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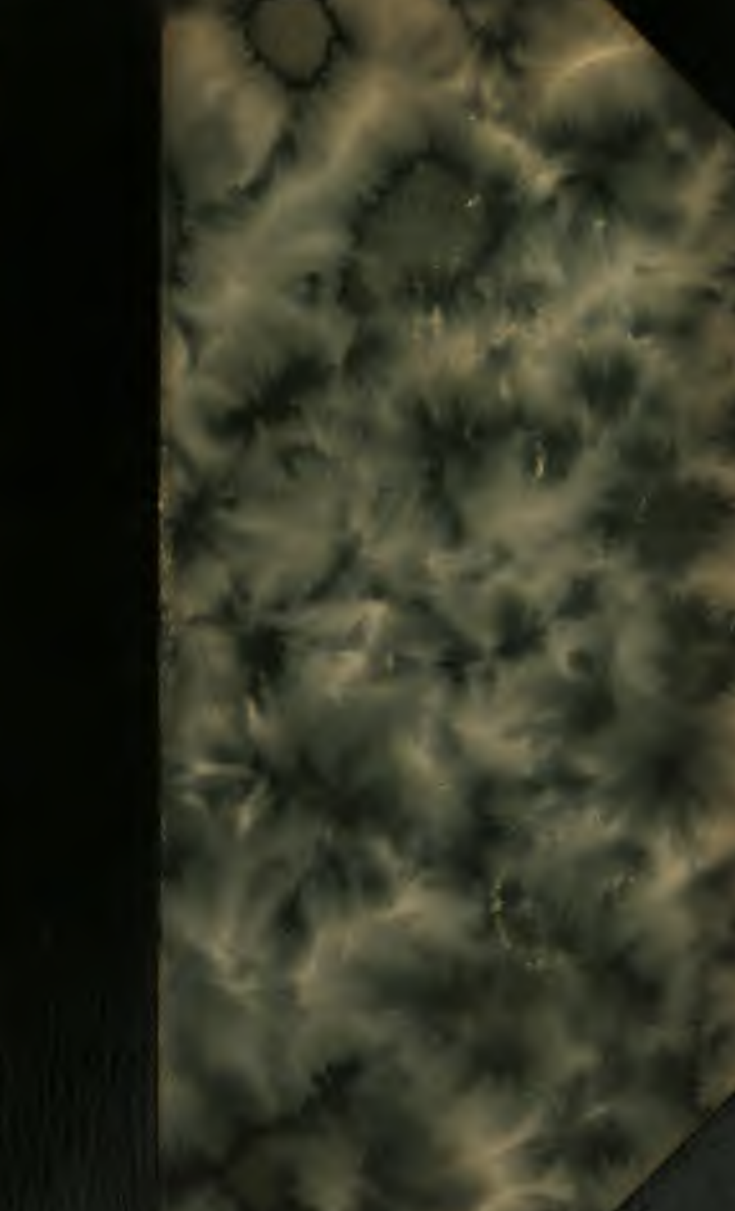
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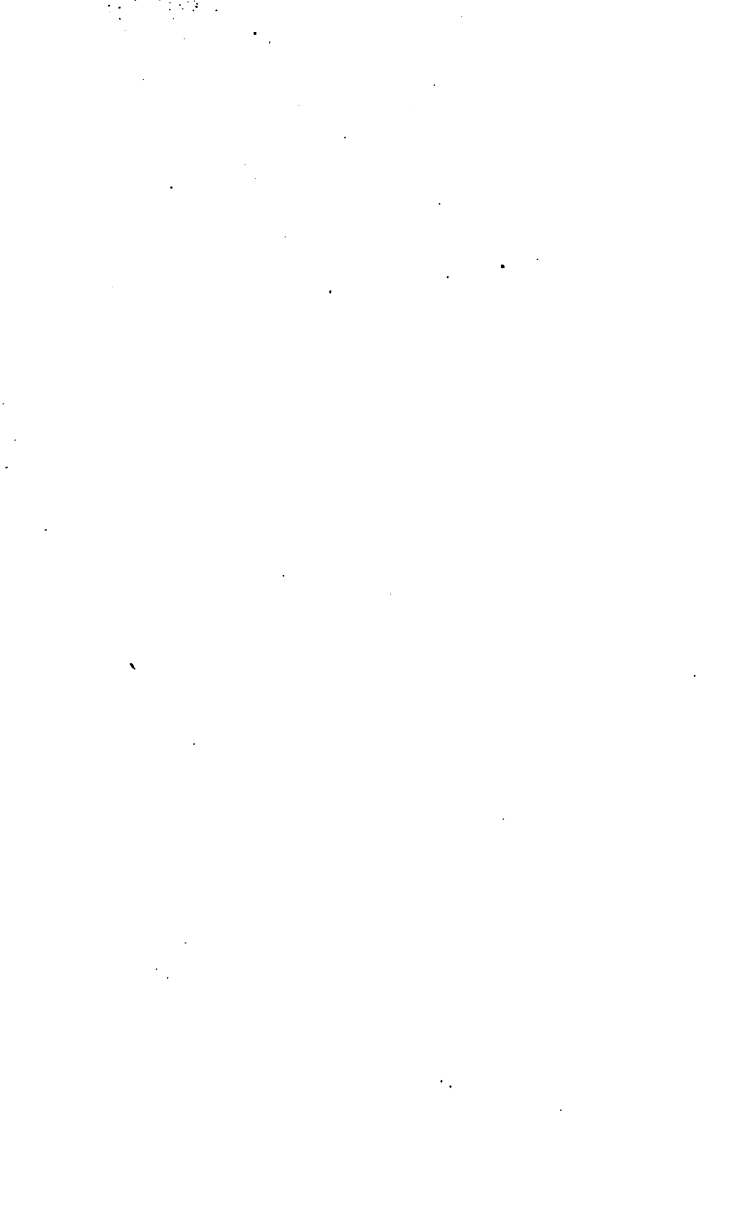
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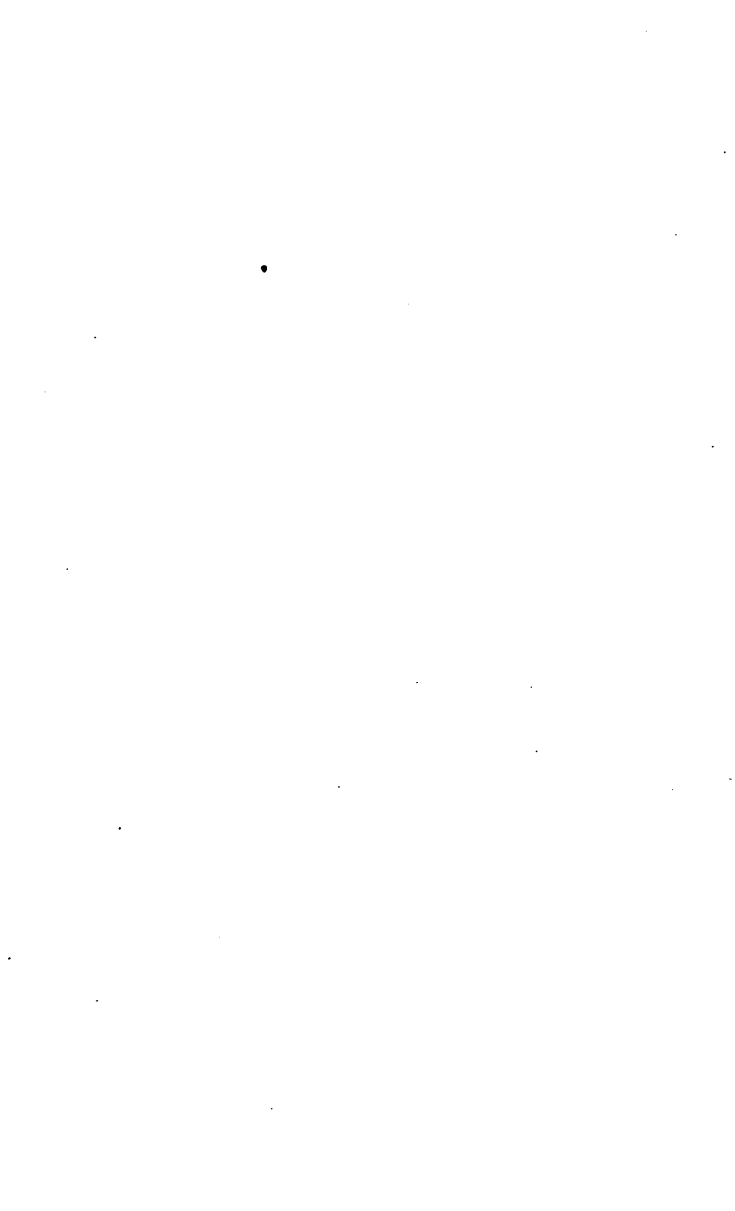






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TALES OF MY LANDLORD.

Fourth and Last Series.



TALES OF MY LANDLORD

Fourth and Last Series,

COLLECTED AND ARRANGED

BY

JEDEDIAH CLEISHBOTHAM,

SCHOOLMASTER AND PARISH-CLERK OF GANDERCLEUCH.

The European with the Asian shore—
Sophia's cupola with golden gleam—
The cypress groves—Olympus high and hoar—
The twelve isles, and the more than I could dream,
Far less describe, present the very view
That charm'd the charming Mary Montagu.

Don Juan.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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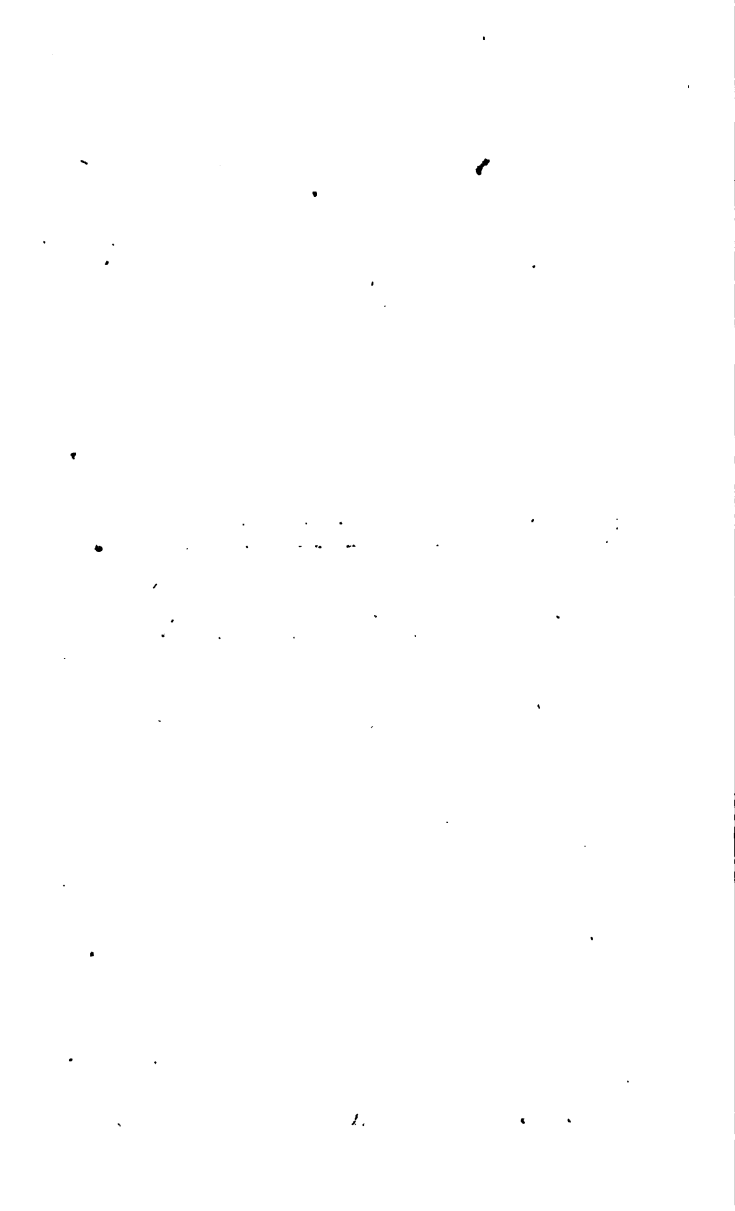
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TALES OF MY LANDLORD.

Fourth and Last Series.



COUNT ROBERT OF PARIS.



COUNT ROBERT OF PARIS.

CHAPTER I.

Heaven knows its time ; the bullet has its billet,
Arrow and javelin each its destined purpose ;
The fated beasts of nature's lower strain
Have each their separate task.

Old Play.

AGELASTES, after crossing the Emperor in the manner we have already described, and after having taken such measures as occurred to him to ensure the success of the conspiracy, returned to the lodge of his garden, where the lady of the Count of Paris still remained, her only companion being an old woman named Vexhelia, the wife of the soldier who accompanied Bertha to the camp of the crusaders ; the kind-hearted maiden having stipulated that, during her absence, her mistress was not to be left without an

attendant, and that attendant connected with the Varangian guard. He had been all day playing the part of the ambitious politician, the selfish time-server, the dark and subtle conspirator; and now it seemed, as if to exhaust the catalogue of his various parts in the human drama, he chose to exhibit himself in the character of the wily sophist, and justify, or seem to justify, the arts by which he had risen to wealth and eminence, and hoped even now to arise to royalty itself.

“Fair Countess,” he said, “what occasion is there for your wearing this veil of sadness over a countenance so lovely?”

“Do you suppose me,” said Brenhilda, “a stock, a stone, or a creature without the feelings of a sensitive being, that I should endure mortification, imprisonment, danger, and distress, without expressing the natural feelings of humanity? Do you imagine that to a lady like me, as free as the unreclaimed falcon, you can offer the insult of captivity, without my being sensible to the disgrace, or incensed against the authors of it? And dost thou think that I will receive consolation at thy hands—at thine—one

of the most active artificers in this web of treachery in which I am so basely entangled?"

"Not entangled certainly by my means"—answered Agelastes; "clap your hands, call for what you wish, and the slave who refuses instant obedience had better been unborn. Had I not, with reference to your safety and your honour, agreed for a short time to be your keeper, that office would have been usurped by the Cæsar, whose object you know, and may partly guess the modes by which it would be pursued. Why then dost thou childishly weep at being held for a short space in an honourable restraint, which the renowned arms of your husband will probably put an end to long ere to-morrow at noon?"

"Canst thou not comprehend," said the Countess, "thou man of many words, but of few honourable thoughts, that a heart like mine, which has been trained in the feelings of reliance upon my own worth and valour, must be necessarily affected with shame at being obliged to accept, even from the sword of a husband, that safety

which I would gladly have owed only to my own?"

"Thou art misled, Countess," answered the philosopher, "by thy pride, a failing predominant in woman. Thinkest thou there has been no offensive assumption in laying aside the character of a mother and a wife, and adopting that of one of those brain-sick female fools, who, like the bravoës of the other sex, sacrifice every thing that is honourable or useful to a frantic and insane affectation of courage? Believe me, fair lady, that the true system of virtue consists in filling thine own place gracefully in society, breeding up thy children, and delighting those of the other sex; and any thing beyond this, may well render thee hateful or terrible, but can add nothing to thy amiable qualities."

"Thou pretendest," said the Countess, "to be a philosopher; methinks thou shouldst know, that the fame which hangs its chaplet on the tomb of a brave hero or heroine, is worth all the petty engagements in which ordinary persons spend the current of their time. One hour of life, crowded to the full with glorious action, and

filled with noble risks, is worth whole years of those mean observances of paltry decorum, in which men steal through existence, like sluggish waters through a marsh, without either honour or observation."

"Daughter," said Agelastes, approaching nearer to the lady, "it is with pain I see you bewildered in errors which a little calm reflection might remove. We may flatter ourselves, and human vanity usually does so, that beings infinitely more powerful than those belonging to mere humanity, are employed daily in measuring out the good and evil of this world, the termination of combats, or the fate of empires, according to their own ideas of what is right or wrong, or, more properly, according to what we ourselves conceive to be such. The Greek heathens, renowned for their wisdom, and glorious for their actions, explained to men of ordinary minds the supposed existence of Jupiter and his Pantheon, where various deities presided over various virtues and vices, and regulated the temporal fortune and future happiness of such as practised them. The more learned and wise

of the ancients rejected such the vulgar interpretation, and wisely, although affecting a deference to the public faith, denied before their disciples in private, the gross fallacies of Tartarus and Olympus, the vain doctrines concerning the gods themselves, and the extravagant expectations which the vulgar entertained of an immortality, supposed to be possessed by creatures who were in every respect mortal, both in the conformation of their bodies, and in the internal belief of their souls. Of these wise and good men some granted the existence of the supposed deities, but denied that they cared about the actions of mankind any more than those of the inferior animals. A merry, jovial, careless life, such as the followers of Epicurus would choose for themselves, was what they assigned for those gods whose being they admitted. Others, more bold or more consistent, entirely denied the existence of deities who apparently had no proper object or purpose, and believed that supernatural beings, whose being and attributes were proved to us by no supernatural appearances, had in reality no existence whatever."

“ Stop, wretch !” said the Countess, “ and know that thou speakest not to one of those blinded heathens of whose abominable doctrines you are detailing the result. Know, that if an erring, I am nevertheless a sincere daughter of the church, and this cross displayed on my shoulder, is a sufficient emblem of the vows I have undertaken in its cause. Be therefore wary, as thou art wily ; for, believe me, if thou scoffest or utterest reproach against my holy religion, what I am unable to answer in language, I will reply to, without hesitation, with the point of my dagger.”

“ To that argument,” said Agelastes, drawing back from the neighbourhood of Brenhilda, “ believe me, fair lady, I am very unwilling to urge your gentleness. But although I shall not venture to say any thing of those superior and benevolent powers to whom you ascribe the management of the world, you will surely not take offence at my noticing those base superstitions which have been adopted in explanation of what is called by the Magi, the Evil Principle. Was there ever received into a human creed, a being

so mean—almost so ridiculous—as the Christian Satan? A goatish figure and limbs, with grotesque features, formed to express the most execrable passions; a degree of power scarce inferior to that of the Deity; and a talent at the same time scarce equal to that of the stupidest of the lowest order! What is he, this being, who is at least the second arbiter of the human race, save an immortal spirit, with the petty spleen and spite of a vindictive old man or old woman?”

Agelastes made a singular pause in this part of his discourse. A mirror of considerable size hung in the apartment, so that the philosopher could see in its reflection the figure of Brenhilda, and remark the change of her countenance, though she had averted her face from him in hatred of the doctrines which he promulgated. On this glass the philosopher had his eyes naturally fixed, and he was confounded at perceiving a figure glide from behind the shadow of a curtain, and glare at him with the supposed mien and expression of the Satan of monkish mythology, or a satyr of the heathen age.

“ Man !” said Brenhilda, whose attention was attracted by this extraordinary apparition, as it seemed, of the fiend, “ have thy wicked words, and still more wicked thoughts, brought the devil amongst us ? If so, dismiss him instantly, else, by Our Lady of the Broken Lances ! thou shalt know better than at present what is the temper of a Frankish maiden, when in presence of the fiend himself, and those who pretend skill to raise him ! I wish not to enter into a contest unless compelled ; but if I am obliged to join battle with an enemy so horrible, believe me, no one shall say that Brenhilda feared him.”

Agelastes, after looking with surprise and horror at the figure as reflected in the glass, turned back his head to examine the substance, of which the reflection was so strange. The object, however, had disappeared behind the curtain, under which it probably lay hid, and it was after a minute or two that the half-gibing, half-scowling countenance showed itself again in the same position in the mirror.

“ By the gods !” said Agelastes——

“ In whom but now,” said the Countess, “ you professed unbelief.”

“ By the gods !” repeated Agelastes, in part recovering himself, “ it is Sylvan ! that singular mockery of humanity, who was said to have been brought from Taprobana. I warrant he also believes in his jolly god Pan, or the veteran Sylvanus. He is to the uninitiated a creature whose appearance is full of terrors, but he shrinks before the philosopher like ignorance before knowledge.” So saying, he with one hand pulled down the curtain, under which the animal had nestled itself when it entered from the garden-window of the pavilion, and with the other, in which he had a staff uplifted, threatened to chastise the creature, with the words—“ How now, Sylvanus ! what insolence is this ?—To your place !”

As, in uttering these words, he struck the animal, the blow unluckily lighted upon his wounded hand, and recalled its bitter smart. The wild temper of the creature returned, unsubdued for the moment by any awe of man ; uttering a fierce, and, at the same time, stifled cry, it flew on the

philosopher, and clasped its strong and sinewy arms about his throat with the utmost fury. The old man twisted and struggled to deliver himself from the creature's grasp, but in vain. Sylvan kept hold of his prize, compressed his sinewy arms, and abode by his purpose of not quitting his hold of the philosopher's throat until he had breathed his last. Two more bitter yells, accompanied each with a desperate contortion of the countenance, and squeeze of the hands, concluded, in less than five minutes, the dreadful strife.

Agelastes lay dead upon the ground, and his assassin Sylvan, springing from the body as if terrified and alarmed at what he had done, made his escape by the window. The Countess stood in astonishment, not knowing exactly whether she had witnessed a supernatural display of the judgment of Heaven, or an instance of its vengeance by mere mortal means. Her new attendant Vexhelia was no less astonished, though her acquaintance with the animal was considerably more intimate.

“Lady,” she said, “that gigantic creature is

an animal of great strength, resembling mankind in form, but huge in its size, and, encouraged by its immense power, sometimes malevolent in its intercourse with mortals. I have heard the Varangians often talk of it as belonging to the Imperial museum. It is fitting we remove the body of this unhappy man, and hide it in a plot of shrubbery in the garden. It is not likely that he will be missed to-night, and to-morrow there will be other matter astir, which will probably prevent much enquiry about him." The Countess Brenhilda assented, for she was not one of those timorous females to whom the countenances of the dead are objects of terror.

Trusting to the parole which she had given, Agelastes had permitted the Countess and her attendant the freedom of his gardens, of that part at least adjacent to the pavilion. They therefore were in little risk of interruption as they bore forth the dead body between them, and without much trouble disposed of it in the thickest part of one of these bosquets with which the garden was studded.

As they returned to their place of abode or

confinement, the Countess, half speaking to herself, half addressing Vexhelia, said, "I am sorry for this; not that the infamous wretch did not deserve the full punishment of Heaven coming upon him in the very moment of blasphemy and infidelity, but because the courage and truth of the unfortunate Brenhilda may be brought into suspicion, as his slaughter took place when he was alone with her and her attendant, and as no one was witness of the singular manner in which the old blasphemer met his end.—Thou knowest," she added, addressing herself to Heaven—"thou! blessed Lady of the Broken Lances, the protectress both of Brenhilda and her husband, well knowest, that whatever faults may be mine, I am free from the slightest suspicion of treachery; and into thy hands I put my cause, with a perfect reliance upon thy wisdom and bounty to bear evidence in my favour." So saying, they returned to the lodge unseen, and with pious and submissive prayers, the Countess closed that eventful evening.

CHAPTER II.

Will you hear of a Spanish lady,
How she wooed an Englishman?
Garments gay, as rich as may be,
Deck'd with jewels she had on.
Of a comely countenance and grace was she,
And by birth and parentage of high degree.

Old Ballad.

WE left Alexius Comnenus after he had unloaded his conscience in the ears of the Patriarch, and received from him a faithful assurance of the pardon and patronage of the national church. He took leave of the dignitary with some exulting exclamations, so unexplicitly expressed, however, that it was by no means easy to conceive the meaning of what he said. His first enquiry, when he reached the Blacquernal, being for his daughter, he was directed to the room encrusted with beautifully carved marble, from which she herself, and many of her race,

derived the proud appellation of *Porphyrogenita*, or born in the purple. Her countenance was clouded with anxiety, which, at the sight of her father, broke out into open and uncontrollable grief.

“ Daughter,” said the Emperor, with a harshness little common to his manner, and a seriousness which he sternly maintained, instead of sympathizing with his daughter’s affliction, “ as you would prevent the silly fool with whom you are connected, from displaying himself to the public both as an ungrateful monster and a traitor, you will not fail to exhort him, by due submission, to make his petition for pardon, accompanied with a full confession of his crimes, or, by my sceptre and my crown, he shall die the death ! Nor will I pardon any who rushes upon his doom in an open tone of defiance, under such a standard of rebellion as my ungrateful son-in-law has hoisted.”

“ What do you require of me, father ?” said the Princess. “ Can you expect that I am to dip my own hands in the blood of this unfortunate man ; or wilt thou seek a revenge yet

more bloody than that which was exacted by the deities of antiquity, upon those criminals who offended against their divine power ?”

“ Think not so, my daughter !” said the Emperor ; “ but rather believe that thou hast the last opportunity afforded by my filial affection, of rescuing, perhaps from death, that silly fool, thy husband, who has so richly deserved it.”

“ My father,” said the Princess, “ God knows it is not at your risk that I would wish to purchase the life of Nicephorus ; but he has been the father of my children, though they are now no more, and women cannot forget that such a tie has existed, even though it has been broken by fate. Permit me only to hope that the unfortunate culprit shall have an opportunity of retrieving his errors ; nor shall it, believe me, be my fault, if he resumes those practices, treasonable at once, and unnatural, by which his life is at present endangered.”

“ Follow me, then, daughter,” said the Emperor, “ and know, that to thee alone I am about to intrust a secret, upon which the safety of my life and my crown, as well as the pardon of my

son-in-law's life, will be found eventually to depend."

He then assumed in haste the garment of a slave of the seraglio, and commanded his daughter to arrange her dress in a more succinct form, and to take in her hand a lighted lamp.

"Whither are we going, my father?" said *Anna Comnena*.

"It matters not," replied her father, "since my destiny calls me, and since thine ordains thee to be my torch-bearer. Believe it, and record it, if thou darest, in thy book, that *Alexius Comnenus* does not, without alarm, descend into those awful dungeons which his predecessors built for men, even when his intentions are innocent, and free from harm. Be silent, and should we meet any inhabitant of those inferior regions, speak not a word, nor make any observation upon his appearance."

Passing through the intricate apartments of the palace, they now came to that large hall through which *Hereward* had passed on the first night of his introduction to the place of *Anna's* recitation, called the Temple of the Muses. It

was constructed, as we have said, of black marble, dimly illuminated. At the upper end of the apartment was a small altar, on which was laid some incense, while over the smoke was suspended, as if projecting from the wall, two imitations of human hands and arms, which were but imperfectly seen.

At the bottom of this hall, a small iron-door led to a narrow and winding staircase, resembling a draw-well in shape and size, the steps of which were excessively steep, and which the Emperor, after a solemn gesture to his daughter commanding her attendance, began to descend with the imperfect light, and by the narrow and difficult steps by which those who visited the under regions of the Blacquernal seemed to bid adieu to the light of day. Door after door they passed in their descent, leading, it was probable, to different ranges of dungeons, from which was obscurely heard the stifled voice of groans and sighs, such as attracted Hereward's attention on a former occasion. The Emperor took no notice of these signs of human misery, and three stories, or ranges of dungeons, had been already

passed, ere the father and daughter arrived at the lowest story of the building, the base of which was the solid rock, roughly carved, upon which were erected the side-walls and arches of solid but unpolished marble.

“ Here,” said Alexius Comnenus, “ all hope, all expectation takes farewell, at the turn of a hinge or the grating of a lock. Yet shall not this be always the case—the dead shall revive and resume their right, and the disinherited of these regions shall again prefer their claim to inhabit the upper world. If I cannot entreat Heaven to my assistance, be assured, my daughter, that rather than be the poor animal which I have stooped to be thought, and even to be painted in thy history, I would sooner brave every danger of the multitude which now erect themselves betwixt me and safety. Nothing is resolved save that I will live and die an emperor; and thou, Anna, be assured, that if there is power in the beauty or in the talents, of which so much has been boasted, that power shall be this evening exercised to the advantage of thy parent, from whom it is derived.”

“What is it that you mean, Imperial father?—Holy Virgin! is this the promise you made me to save the life of the unfortunate Nicephorus?”

“And so I will,” said the Emperor; “and I am now about that action of benevolence. But think not I will once more warm in my bosom the household snake which had so nearly stung me to death. No, daughter, I have provided for thee a fitting husband, in one who is able to maintain and defend the rights of the Emperor thy father;—and beware how thou opposest an obstacle to what is my pleasure! for behold these walls of marble, though unpolished, and recollect it is as possible to die within the marble as to be born there.”

The Princess Anna Comnena was frightened at seeing her father in a state of mind entirely different from any which she had before witnessed. “O, Heaven! that my mother were here!” she ejaculated, in the terror of something she hardly knew what.

“Anna,” said the Emperor, “your fears and your screams are alike in vain. I am one of those, who, on ordinary occasions, hardly nourish

a wish of my own, and account myself obliged to those who, like my wife and daughter, take care to save me all the trouble of free judgment. But when the vessel is among the breakers, and the master is called to the helm, believe that no meaner hand shall be permitted to interfere with him, nor will the wife and daughter, whom he indulged in prosperity, be allowed to thwart his will while he can yet call it his own. Thou couldst scarcely fail to understand that I was almost prepared to have given thee, as a mark of my sincerity, to yonder obscure Varangian, without asking question of either birth or blood. Thou mayst hear when I next promise thee to a three-years' inhabitant of these vaults, who shall be Cæsar in Briennius's stead, if I can move him to accept a princess for his bride, and an imperial crown for his inheritance, in place of a starving dungeon."

"I tremble at your words, father," said Anna Comnena; "how canst thou trust a man who has felt thy cruelty?—How canst thou dream that aught can ever in sincerity reconcile thee to one whom thou hast deprived of his eyesight?"

“Care not for that,” said Alexius; “he becomes mine, or he shall never know what it is to be again his own.—And thou, girl, mayst rest assured, that, if I will it, thou art next day the bride of my present captive, or thou retirest to the most severe nunnery, never again to mix with society. Be silent, therefore, and await thy doom, as it shall come, and hope not that thy utmost endeavours can avert the current of thy destiny.”

As he concluded this singular dialogue, in which he had assumed a tone to which his daughter was a stranger, and before which she trembled, he passed on through more than one strictly fastened door, while his daughter, with a faltering step, illuminated him on the obscure road. At length he found admittance by another passage into the cell in which Ursel was confined, and found him reclining in hopeless misery,—all those expectations having faded from his heart which the Count of Paris had by his indomitable gallantry for a time excited. He turned his sightless eyes towards the place where he heard the moving of bolts and the approach of steps.

“A new feature,” he said, “in my imprison-

ment—a man comes with a heavy and determined step, and a woman or a child with one that scarcely presses the floor!—Is it my death that you bring?—Believe me, that I have lived long enough in these dungeons to bid my doom welcome.”

“It is not thy death, noble Ursel,” said the Emperor, in a voice somewhat disguised. “Life, liberty, whatever the world has to give, is placed by the Emperor Alexius at the feet of his noble enemy, and he trusts that many years of happiness and power, together with the command of a large share of the empire, will soon obliterate the recollection of the dungeons of the Blacquer-nal.”

“It cannot be,” said Ursel, with a sigh. “He upon whose eyes the sun has set even at middle day, can have nothing left to hope from the most advantageous change of circumstances.”

“You are not entirely assured of that,” said the Emperor; “allow us to convince you that what is intended towards you is truly favourable and liberal, and I hope you will be rewarded by finding that there is more possibility of amend-

ment in your case, than your first apprehensions are willing to receive. Make an effort, and try whether your eyes are not sensible of the light of the lamp."

"Do with me," said Ursel, "according to your pleasure; I have neither strength to remonstrate, nor the force of mind equal to make me set your cruelty at defiance. Of something like light I am sensible; but whether it is reality or illusion, I cannot determine. If you are come to deliver me from this living sepulchre, I pray to God to requite you; and if, under such deceitful pretence, you mean to take my life, I can only commend my soul to Heaven, and the vengeance due to my death to Him who can behold the darkest places in which injustice can shroud itself."

So saying, and the revulsion of his spirits rendering him unable to give almost any other signs of existence, Ursel sunk back upon his seat of captivity, and spoke not another word during the time that Alexius disembarrassed him of those chains which had so long hung about

him, that they almost seemed to make a part of his person.

“ This is an affair in which thy aid can scarce be sufficient, Anna,” said the Emperor; “ it would have been well if you and I could have borne him into the open air by our joint strength, for there is little wisdom in showing the secrets of this prison-house to those to whom they are not yet known; nevertheless, go, my child, and at a short distance from the head of the staircase which we descended, thou wilt find Edward, the bold and trusty Varangian, who, on your communicating to him my orders, will come hither and render his assistance, and see that you send also the experienced leech, Douban.”

Terrified, half-stifled, and half-struck with horror, the lady yet felt a degree of relief from the somewhat milder tone in which her father addressed her. With tottering steps, yet in some measure encouraged by the tenor of her instructions, she ascended the staircase which yawned upon these infernal dungeons. As she approached the top, a large and strong figure threw its broad shadow between the lamp and the opening

of the hall. Frightened nearly to death at the thoughts of becoming the wife of a squalid wretch like Ursel, a moment of weakness seized upon the Princess's mind, and, when she considered the melancholy option which her father had placed before her, she could not but think that the handsome and gallant Varangian, who had already rescued the royal family from such imminent danger, was a fitter person with whom to unite herself, if she must needs make a second choice, than the singular and disgusting being whom her father's policy had raked from the bottom of the Blacquernal dungeons.

I will not say of poor Anna Comnena, who was a timid but not an unfeeling woman, that she would have embraced such a proposal, had not the life of her present husband, Nicephorus Briemius, been in extreme danger; and it was obviously the determination of the Emperor, that if he spared him, it should be on the sole condition of unloosing his daughter's hand, and binding her to some one of better faith, and possessed of a greater desire to prove an affectionate son-in-law. Neither did the plan of adopting the

Varangian as a second husband, enter decidedly into the mind of the Princess. The present was a moment of danger, in which her rescue to be successful must be sudden, and perhaps, if once achieved, the lady might have had an opportunity of freeing herself both from Ursel and the Varangian, without disjoining either of them from her father's assistance, or of herself losing it. At any rate, the surest means of safety were to secure, if possible, the young soldier, whose features and appearance were of a kind which rendered the task no way disagreeable to a beautiful woman. The schemes of conquest are so natural to the fair sex, and the whole idea passed so quickly through Anna Comæna's mind, that having first entered while the soldier's shadow was interposed between her and the lamp, it had fully occupied her quick imagination, when, with deep reverence, and great surprise at her sudden appearance on the ladder of Acheron, the Varangian advancing, knelt down, and lent his arms to the assistance of the fair lady, in order to help her out of the dreary staircase.

“Dearest Hereward,” said the lady, with a

degree of intimacy which seemed unusual, "how much do I rejoice, in this dreadful night, to have fallen under your protection! I have been in places which the spirit of hell appears to have contrived for the human race." The alarm of the Princess, the familiarity of a beautiful woman, who, while in mortal fear, seeks refuge, like a frightened dove, in the bosom of the strong and the brave, must be the excuse of Anna Comnena for the tender epithet with which she greeted Hereward; nor, if he had chosen to answer in the same tone, which, faithful as he was, might have proved the case if the meeting had chanced before he saw Bertha, would the daughter of Alexius have been, to say the truth, irreconcilably offended. Exhausted as she was, she suffered herself to repose upon the broad breast and shoulder of the Anglo-Saxon; nor did she make an attempt to recover herself, although the decorum of her sex and station seemed to recommend such an exertion. Hereward was obliged himself to ask her, with the unimpassioned and reverential demeanour of a private soldier to a Princess, whether he ought to summon her female

attendants? to which she faintly uttered a negative. "No, no"—said she, "I have a duty to execute for my father, and I must not summon eyewitnesses;—he knows me to be in safety, Hereward, since he knows I am with thee; and if I am a burden to you in my present state of weakness, I shall soon recover, if you will set me down upon the marble steps."

"Heaven forbid, lady," said Hereward, "that I were thus neglectful of your Highness's precious health! I see your two young ladies, Astarte and Violante, are in quest of you—Permit me to summon them hither, and I will keep watch upon you if you are unable to retire to your chamber, where, methinks, the present disorder of your nerves will be most properly treated."

"Do as thou wilt, barbarian," said the Princess, rallying herself, with a certain degree of pique, arising perhaps from her not thinking more *dramatis personæ* were appropriate to the scene, than the two who were already upon the stage. Then, as if for the first time, appearing to recollect the message with which she had been

commissioned, she exhorted the Varangian to repair instantly to her father.

On such occasions, the slightest circumstances have their effect on the actors. The Anglo-Saxon was sensible that the Princess was somewhat offended, though whether she was so, on account of her being actually in Hereward's arms, or whether the cause of her anger was the being nearly discovered there by the two young maidens, the sentinel did not presume to guess; but departed for the gloomy vaults to join Alexius, with the never-failing double-edged axe, the bane of many a Turk, glittering upon his shoulder.

Astarte and her companion had been dispatched by the Empress Irene in search of Anna Comnena, through those apartments of the palace which she was wont to inhabit. The daughter of Alexius could nowhere be found, although the business on which they were seeking her was described by the Empress as of the most pressing nature. Nothing, however, in a palace, passes altogether unespied, so that the Empress's messengers at length received information that their

mistress and the Emperor had been seen to descend that gloomy access to the dungeons, which, by allusion to the classical infernal regions, was termed the Pit of Acheron. They came thither, accordingly, and we have related the consequences. Hereward thought it necessary to say, that her Imperial Highness had swooned upon being suddenly brought into the upper air. The Princess, on the other part, briskly shook off her juvenile attendants, and declared herself ready to proceed to the chamber of her mother. The obeisance which she made Hereward at parting, had something in it of haughtiness, yet evidently qualified by a look of friendship and regard. As she passed an apartment in which some of the royal slaves were in waiting, she addressed to one of them, an old respectable man, of medical skill, a private and hurried order, desiring him to go to the assistance of her father, whom he would find at the bottom of the staircase called the Pit of Acheron, and to take his scimitar along with him. To hear, as usual, was to obey, and Douban, for that was his name, only replied by that significant sign which

indicates immediate acquiescence. In the meantime, Anna Comnena herself hastened onward to her mother's apartments, in which she found the Empress alone.

“Go hence, maidens,” said Irene, “and do not let any one have access to these apartments, even if the Emperor himself should command it. Shut the door,” she said, “Anna Comnena; and if the jealousy of the stronger sex do not allow us the masculine privilege of bolts and bars, to secure the insides of our apartments, let us avail ourselves, as quickly as may be, of such opportunities as are permitted us; and remember, Princess, that however implicit your duty to your father, it is yet more so to me, who am of the same sex with thyself, and may truly call thee, even according to the letter, blood of my blood, and bone of my bone.—Be assured thy father knows not at this moment the feelings of a woman. Neither he nor any man alive can justly conceive the pangs of the heart which beats under a woman's robe. These men, Anna, would tear asunder without scruple the tenderest ties of affection, the whole structure of domestic fel-

city, in which lie a woman's cares, her joy, her pain, her love, and her despair. Trust, therefore, to me, my daughter! and believe me, I will at once save thy father's crown and thy happiness. The conduct of thy husband has been wrong, most cruelly wrong; but, Anna, he is a man—and in calling him such, I lay to his charge, as natural frailties, thoughtless treachery, wanton infidelity, every species of folly and inconsistency, to which his race is subject. You ought not, therefore, to think of his faults, unless it be to forgive them."

"Madam," said Anna Comnena, "forgive me if I remind you that you recommend to a princess, born in the purple itself, a line of conduct which would hardly become the female who carries the pitcher for the needful supply of water to the village well. All who are around me have been taught to pay me the obeisance due to my birth, and while this Nicephorus Briennius crept on his knees to your daughter's hand which you extended towards him, he was rather receiving the yoke of a mistress than accepting a household alliance with a wife. He has incurred his

doom, without a touch even of that temptation which may be pled by lesser culprits in his condition; and if it is the will of my father that he should die, or suffer banishment, or imprisonment, for the crime he has committed, it is not the business of Anna Comnena to interfere, she being the most injured among the imperial family, who have in so many, and such gross respects, the right to complain of his falsehood."

"Daughter," replied the Empress, "so far I agree with you, that the treason of Nicephorus towards your father and myself has been in a great degree unpardonable; nor do I easily see on what footing, save that of generosity, his life could be saved. But still you are yourself in different circumstances from me, and may, as an affectionate and fond wife, compare the intimacies of your former habits with the bloody change which is so soon to be the consequence and the conclusion of his crimes. He is possessed of that person and of those features which women most readily recall to their memory, whether alive or dead. Think what it will cost you to recollect that the rugged executioner received his last

salute,—that the shapely neck had no better repose than the rough block—that the tongue, the sound of which you used to prefer to the choicest instruments of music, is silent in the dust !”

Anna, who was not insensible to the personal graces of her husband, was much affected by this forcible appeal. “Why distress me thus, mother ?” she replied in a weeping accent. “Did I not feel as acutely as you would have me to do, this moment, however awful, would be easily borne. I had but to think of him as he is, to contrast his personal qualities with those of the mind, by which they are more than overbalanced, and resign myself to his deserved fate with unresisting submission to my father’s will.”

“And that,” said the Empress, “would be to bind thee, by his sole fiat, to some obscure wretch, whose habits of plotting and intriguing had, by some miserable chance, given him the opportunity of becoming of importance to the Emperor, and who is therefore to be rewarded by the hand of Anna Comnena.”

“Do not think so meanly of me, madam,”

said the Princess—"I know, as well as ever Grecian maiden did, how I should free myself from dishonour; and, you may trust me, you shall never blush for your daughter."

"Tell me not that," said the Empress, "since I shall blush alike for the relentless cruelty which gives up a once beloved husband to an ignominious death, and for the passion, for which I want a name, which would replace him by an obscure barbarian from the extremity of Thule, or some wretch escaped from the Blacquernal dungeons."

The Princess was astonished to perceive that her mother was acquainted with the purposes, even the most private, which her father had formed for his governance during this emergency. She was ignorant that Alexius and his royal consort, in other respects living together with a decency ever exemplary in people of their rank, had sometimes, on interesting occasions, family debates, in which the husband, provoked by the seeming unbelief of his partner, was tempted to let her guess more of his real

purposes than he would have coolly imparted of his own calm choice.

The Princess was affected at the anticipation of the death of her husband, nor could this have been reasonably supposed to be otherwise; but she was still more hurt and affronted by her mother taking it for granted that she designed upon the instant to replace the Cæsar by an uncertain, and at all events an unworthy successor. Whatever considerations had operated to make Hereward her choice, their effect was lost when the match was placed in this odious and degrading point of view; besides which is to be remembered, that women almost instinctively deny their first thoughts in favour of a suitor, and seldom willingly reveal them, unless time and circumstance concur to favour them. She called Heaven therefore passionately to witness, while she repelled the charge.

“Bear witness,” she said, “Our Lady, Queen of Heaven! Bear witness, saints and martyrs, all ye blessed ones, who are, more than ourselves, the guardians of our mental purity! that I know no passion which I dare not avow, and that if

Nicephorus's life depended on my entreaty to God and men, all his injurious acts towards me disregarded and despised, it should be as long as Heaven gave to those servants whom it snatched from the earth, without suffering the pangs of mortality !”

“ You have sworn boldly,” said the Empress. “ See, Anna Comnena, that you keep your word, for believe me it will be tried.”

“ What will be tried, mother ?” said the Princess ; “ or what have I to do to pronounce the doom of the Cæsar, who is not subject to my power ?”

“ I will show you,” said the Empress, gravely ; and, leading her towards a sort of wardrobe, which formed a closet in the wall, she withdrew a curtain which hung before it, and placed before her her unfortunate husband, Nicephorus Briennius, half-attired, with his sword drawn in his hand. Looking upon him as an enemy, and conscious of some schemes with respect to him which had passed through her mind in the course of these troubles, the Princess screamed faintly,

upon perceiving him so near her with a weapon in his hand.

“Be more composed,” said the Empress, “or this wretched man, if discovered, falls no less a victim to thy idle fears than to thy baneful revenge.”

Nicephorus at this speech seemed to have adopted his cue, for, dropping the point of his sword, and falling on his knees before the Princess, he clasped his hands to entreat for mercy.

“What hast thou to ask from me?” said his wife, naturally assured, by her husband’s prostration, that the stronger force was upon her own side—“What hast thou to ask from me, that outraged gratitude, betrayed affection, the most solemn vows violated, and the fondest ties of nature torn asunder like the spider’s broken web, will permit thee to put in words for very shame?”

“Do not suppose, Anna,” replied the suppliant, “that I am at this eventful period of my life to play the hypocrite, for the purpose of saving the wretched remnant of a dishonoured existence. I am but desirous to part in charity

with thee, to make my peace with Heaven, and to nourish the last hope of making my way, though burdened with many crimes, to those regions in which alone I can find thy beauty, thy talents, equalled at least, if not excelled."

"You hear him, daughter?" said Irene; "his boon is for forgiveness alone; thy condition is the more godlike, since thou mayst unite the safety of his life with the pardon of his offences."

"Thou art deceived, mother," answered Anna. "It is not mine to pardon his guilt, far less to remit his punishment. You have taught me to think of myself as future ages shall know me; what will they say of me, those future ages, when I am described as the unfeeling daughter, who pardoned the intended assassin of her father, because she saw in him her own unfaithful husband?"

"See there," said the Cæsar, "is not that, most serene Empress, the very point of despair? and have I not in vain offered my life-blood to wipe out the stain of parricide and ingratitude? Have I not also vindicated myself from the most unpardonable part of the accusation, which

charged me with attempting the murder of the godlike Emperor? Have I not sworn by all that is sacred to man, that my purpose went no farther than to sequestrate Alexius for a little time from the fatigues of empire, and place him where he should quietly enjoy ease and tranquillity; while, at the same time, his empire should be as implicitly regulated by himself, his sacred pleasure being transmitted through me, as in any respect, or at any period, it had ever been?"

"Erring man!" said the Princess, "hast thou approached so near to the footstool of Alexius Comnenus, and durst thou form so false an estimate of him, as to conceive it possible that he would consent to be a mere puppet by whose intervention you might have brought his empire to submission? Know that the blood of Comnenus is not so poor; my father would have resisted the treason in arms; and by the death of thy benefactor only couldst thou have gratified the suggestions of thy criminal ambition."

"Be such your belief," said the Cæsar; "I have said enough for a life which is not and ought not to be dear to me. Call your guards, and let

them take the life of the unfortunate Briennius, since it has become hateful to his once beloved Anna Comnena. Be not afraid that any resistance of mine shall render the scene of my apprehension dubious or fatal. Nicephorus Briennius is Cæsar no longer, and he thus throws at the feet of his Princess and spouse, the only poor means which he has of resisting the just doom which is therefore at her pleasure to pass."

He cast his sword before the feet of the Princess, while Irene exclaimed, weeping, or seeming to weep bitterly, "I have indeed read of such scenes; but could I ever have thought that my own daughter would have been the principal actress in one of them—could I ever have thought that her mind, admired by every one as a palace for the occupation of Apollo and the Muses, should not have had room enough for the humbler, but more amiable virtue of feminine charity and compassion, which builds itself a nest in the bosom of the lowest village girl? Do thy gifts, accomplishments, and talents, spread hardness as well as polish over thy heart? If so, a hundred times better renounce them all, and retain in

their stead those gentle and domestic virtues which are the first honours of the female heart. A woman who is pitiless, is a worse monster than one who is unsexed by any other passion."

"What would you have me do?" said Anna; "you, mother, ought to know better than I, that the life of my father is hardly consistent with the existence of this bold and cruel man. O, I am sure he still meditates his purpose of conspiracy! He that could deceive a woman in the manner he has done me, will not relinquish a plan which is founded upon the death of his benefactor."

"You do me injustice, Anna," said Brien-nius, starting up, and imprinting a kiss upon her lips ere she was aware. "By this caress, the last that will pass between us, I swear, that if in my life I have yielded to folly, I have, notwithstanding, never been guilty of a treason of the heart towards a woman as superior to the rest of the female world in talents and accomplishments, as in personal beauty."

The Princess, much softened, shook her head, as she replied—"Ah, Nicephorus!—such were:

once your words! such, perhaps, were then your thoughts! But who, or what, shall now warrant to me the veracity of either?"

"Those very accomplishments, and that very beauty itself," replied Nicephorus.

"And if more is wanting," said Irene, "thy mother will enter her security for him. Deem her not an insufficient pledge in this affair; she is thy mother, and the wife of Alexius Comnenus, interested beyond all human beings in the growth and increase of the power and dignity of her husband and her child; and one who sees on this occasion an opportunity for exercising generosity, for soldering up the breaches of the Imperial house, and reconstructing the frame of government upon a basis, which, if there be faith and gratitude in man, shall never be again exposed to hazard."

"To the reality of that faith and gratitude, then," said the Princess, "we must trust implicitly, as it is your will, mother; although even my own knowledge of the subject, both through study and experience of the world, has called me to observe the rashness of such confidence."

But although we two may forgive Nicephorus's errors, the Emperor is still the person to whom the final reference must be had, both as to pardon and favour."

"Fear not Alexius," answered her mother; "he will speak determinedly and decidedly; but, if he acts not in the very moment of forming the resolution, it is no more to be relied on than an icicle in time of thaw. Do thou apprise me, if thou canst, what the Emperor is at present doing, and take my word I will find means to bring him round to our opinion."

"Must I then betray secrets which my father has intrusted to me?" said the Princess; "and to one who has so lately held the character of his avowed enemy?"

"Call it not betray," said Irene, "since it is written, thou shalt betray no one, least of all thy father, and the father of the empire. Yet again it is written by the holy Luke, that men shall be betrayed, both by parents and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends, and therefore surely also by daughters; by which I only mean thou shalt discover to us thy father's secrets, so far as may

enable us to save the life of thy husband. The necessity of the case excuses whatever may be otherwise considered as irregular."

"Be it so then, mother. Having yielded my consent, perhaps too easily, to snatch this malefactor from my father's justice, I am sensible I must secure his safety by such means as are in my power. I left my father at the bottom of those stairs, called the Pit of Acheron, in the cell of a blind man, to whom he gave the name of Ursel."

"Holy Mary!" exclaimed the Empress, "thou hast named a name which has been long unspoken in the open air."

"Has the Emperor's sense of his danger from the living," said the Cæsar, "induced him to invoke the dead?—for Ursel has been no living man for the space of three years."

"It matters not," said Anna Comnena; "I tell you true. My father even now held conference with a miserable-looking prisoner whom he so named."

"It is a danger the more," said the Cæsar; "he cannot have forgotten the zeal with which

I embraced the cause of the present Emperor against his own; and so soon as he is at liberty, he will study to avenge it. For this we must endeavour to make some provision, though it increases our difficulties.—Sit down then, my gentle, my beneficent mother;—and thou, my wife, who hast preferred thy love for an unworthy husband to the suggestions of jealous passion and of headlong revenge, sit down, and let us see in what manner it may be in our power, consistently with your duty to the Emperor, to bring our broken vessel securely into port.”

He employed much natural grace of manner in handing the mother and daughter to their seats; and, taking his place confidentially between them, all were soon engaged in concerting what measures should be taken for the morrow, not forgetting such as should at once have the effect of preserving the Cæsar's life, and at the same time of securing the Grecian empire against the conspiracy of which he had been the chief instigator. Briennius ventured to hint, that perhaps the best way would be to suffer the con-

spiracy to proceed as originally intended, pledging his own faith that the rights of Alexius should be held inviolate during the struggle; but his influence over the Empress and her daughter did not extend to obtaining so great a trust. They plainly protested against permitting him to leave the palace, or taking the least share in the confusion which to-morrow was certain to witness.

“ You forget, noble ladies,” said the Cæsar, “ that my honour is concerned in meeting the Count of Paris.”

“ Pshaw! tell me not of your honour, Briennius,” said Anna Comnena; “ do I not well know, that although the honour of the western knights be a species of Moloch, a flesh-devouring, blood-quaffing demon, yet that that which is the god of idolatry to the eastern warriors, though equally loud and noisy in the hall, is far less implacable in the field? Believe not that I have forgiven great injuries and insults, in order to take such false coin as *honour* in payment. Your ingenuity is but poor, if you cannot devise some excuse which will satisfy the Greeks; and in

good sooth, Briennius, to this battle you go not, whether for your good or for your ill. Believe not that I will consent to your meeting either Count or Countess, whether in warlike combat or amorous parley. So you may at a word count upon remaining prisoner here until the hour appointed for such gross folly be past and over."

The Cæsar, perhaps, was not in his heart angry that his wife's pleasure was so bluntly and resolutely expressed against the intended combat. "If," said he, "you are determined to take my honour into your own keeping, I am here for the present your prisoner, nor have I the means of interfering with your pleasure. When once at liberty, the free exercise of my valour and my lance is once more my own."

"Be it so, Sir Paladin," said the Princess, very composedly. "I have good hope that neither of them will involve you with any of you dare-devils of Paris, whether male or female, and that we will regulate the pitch to which your courage soars, by the estimation of Greek philosophy, and the judgment of our blessed Lady of Mercy, not her of the Broken Lances."

At this moment, an authoritative knock at the door alarmed the consultation of the Cæsar and the ladies.

CHAPTER III.

Physician. Be comforted, good madam : the great rage,
You see, is cured in him : and yet it is danger
To make him even o'er the time he has lost.
Desire him to go in : trouble him no more,
Till farther settling.

King Lear.

We left the Emperor Alexius Comnenus at the bottom of a subterranean vault, with a lamp expiring, and having charge of a prisoner, who seemed himself nearly reduced to the same extremity. For the first two or three moments, he listened after his daughter's retiring footsteps. He grew impatient, and began to long for her return before it was possible she could have traversed the path betwixt him and the summit of these gloomy stairs. A minute or two he endured with patience the absence of the assistance

which he had sent her to summon; but strange suspicions began to cross his imagination. Could it be possible? Had she changed her purpose on account of the hard words which he had used towards her? Had she resolved to leave her father to his fate in his hour of utmost need? and was he to rely no longer upon the assistance which he had implored her to send?

The short time which the Princess trifled away in a sort of gallantry with the Varangian Hereward, was magnified tenfold by the impatience of the Emperor, who began to think that she was gone to fetch the accomplices of the Cæsar to assault their prince in his defenceless condition, and carry into effect their half-disconcerted conspiracy.

After a considerable time, filled up with this feeling of agonizing uncertainty, he began at length, more composedly, to recollect the little chance there was that the Princess would, even for her own sake, resentful as she was in the highest degree of her husband's ill behaviour, join her resources to his, to the destruction of one who had so generally showed himself an

indulgent and affectionate father. When he had adopted this better mood, a step was heard upon the staircase, and after a long and unequal descent, Hereward, in his heavy armour, at length coolly arrived at the bottom of the steps. Behind him, panting and trembling, partly with cold and partly with terror, came Douban, the slave well skilled in medicine.

“Welcome, good Edward! Welcome, Douban!” he said, “whose medical skill is sufficiently able to counterbalance the weight of years which hang upon him.”

“Your Highness is gracious,” said Douban—but what he would have farther said was cut off by a violent fit of coughing, the consequence of his age, of his feeble habit, of the damps of the dungeon, and the rugged exercise of descending the long and difficult staircase.

“Thou art unaccustomed to visit thy patients in so rough an abode,” said Alexius; “and, nevertheless, to the damps of these dreary regions state necessity obliges us to confine many, who are no less our beloved subjects in reality than they are in title.”

The medical man continued his cough, perhaps as an apology for not giving that answer of assent, with which his conscience did not easily permit him to reply to an observation, which, though stated by one who should know the fact, seemed not to be in itself altogether likely.

“Yes, my Douban,” said the Emperor, “in this strong case of steel and adamant have we found it necessary to enclose the redoubted Ursel, whose fame is spread through the whole world, both for military skill, political wisdom, personal bravery, and other noble gifts, which we have been obliged to obscure for a time, in order that we might, at the fittest conjuncture, which is now arrived, restore them to the world in their full lustre. Feel his pulse, therefore, Douban—consider him as one who hath suffered severe confinement, with all its privations, and is about to be suddenly restored to the full enjoyment of life, and whatever renders life valuable.”

“I will do my best,” said Douban; “but your Majesty must consider, that we work upon a frail and exhausted subject, whose health seems already wellnigh gone, and may perhaps vanish

in an instant—like this pale and trembling light, whose precarious condition the life-breath of this unfortunate patient seems closely to resemble.”

“ Desire, therefore, good Douban, one or two of the mutes who serve in the interior, and who have repeatedly been thy assistants in such cases—or stay—Edward, thy motions will be more speedy; do thou go for the mutes—make them bring some kind of litter to transport the patient; and, Douban, do thou superintend the whole. Transport him instantly to a suitable apartment, only taking care that it be secret, and let him enjoy the comforts of the bath, and whatever else may tend to restore his feeble animation—keeping in mind, that he must, if possible, appear to-morrow in the field.”

“ That will be hard,” said Douban, “ after having been, it would appear, subjected to such fare and such usage as his fluctuating pulse intimates but too plainly.”

“ ’Twas a mistake of the dungeon-keeper, the fishman villain, who should not go without his reward,” continued the Emperor, “ had not Heaven already bestowed it by the strange means of a

sylvan man, or native of the woods, who yesterday put to death the jailer who meditated the death of his prisoner—Yes, my dear Douban, a private sentinel of our guards called the Immortal, had wellnigh annihilated this flower of our trust, whom for a time we were compelled to immure in secret. Then, indeed, a rude hammer had dashed to pieces an unparalleled brilliant, but the fates have arrested such a misfortune.”

The assistance having arrived, the physician, who seemed more accustomed to act than to speak, directed a bath to be prepared with medicated herbs, and gave it as his opinion, that the patient should not be disturbed till to-morrow's sun was high in the heavens. Ursel accordingly was assisted to the bath, which was employed according to the directions of the physician; but without affording any material symptoms of recovery. From thence he was transferred to a cheerful bedchamber, opening by an ample window to one of the terraces of the palace, which commanded an extensive prospect. These operations were performed upon a frame

so extremely stupified by previous suffering, so dead to the usual sensations of existence, that it was not till the sensibility should be gradually restored, by friction of the stiffened limbs, and other means, that the leech hoped the mists of the intellect should at length begin to clear away.

Douban readily undertook to obey the commands of the Emperor, and remain by the bed of the patient until the dawn of morning, ready to support nature as far as the skill of leechcraft admitted.

From the mutes, much more accustomed to be the executioners of the Emperor's displeasure than of his humanity, Douban selected one man of milder mood, and, by Alexius's order, made him understand, that the task in which he was engaged was to be kept most strictly secret, while the hardened slave was astonished to find that the attentions paid to the sick were to be rendered with yet more mystery than the bloody offices of death and torture.

The passive patient received the various acts of attention which were rendered to him in

silence ; and if not totally without consciousness, at least without a distinct comprehension of their object. After the soothing operation of the bath, and the voluptuous exchange of the rude and musty pile of straw, on which he had stretched himself for years, for a couch of the softest down, Ursel was presented with a sedative draught, slightly tinctured with an opiate. The balmy restorer of nature came thus invoked, and the captive sunk into a delicious slumber long unknown to him, and which seemed to occupy equally his mental faculties and his bodily frame, while the features were released from their rigid tenor, and the posture of the limbs, no longer disturbed by fits of cramp, and sudden and agonising twists and throes, seemed changed for a placid state of the most perfect ease and tranquillity.

The morn was already colouring the horizon, and the freshness of the breeze of dawn had insinuated itself into the lofty halls of the palace of the Blacquernal, when a gentle tap at the door of the chamber awaked Douban, who, undisturbed from the calm state of his patient, had

indulged himself with a brief repose. The door opened, and a figure appeared, disguised in the robes worn by an officer of the palace, and concealing beneath an artificial beard of great size, and of a white colour, the features of the Emperor himself. "Douban," said Alexius, "how fares it with thy patient, whose safety is this day of such consequence to the Grecian state?"

"Well, my lord," replied the physician, "excellently well; and if he is not now disturbed, I will wager whatever skill I possess, that nature, assisted by the art of the physician, will triumph over the damps and the unwholesome air of the impure dungeon. Only be prudent, my lord, and let not an untimely haste bring this Ursel forward into the contest ere he has arranged the disturbed current of his ideas, and recovered, in some degree, the spring of his mind, and the powers of his body."

"I will rule my impatience," said the Emperor, "or rather, Douban, I will be ruled by thee. Thinkest thou he is awake?"

"I am inclined to think so," said the leech, "but he opens not his eyes, and seems to me as

if he absolutely resisted the natural impulse to rouse himself and look around him."

"Speak to him," said the Emperor, "and let us know what is passing in his mind."

"It is at some risk," replied the physician, "but you shall be obeyed.—Ursel," he said, approaching the bed of his blind patient, and then, in a louder tone, he repeated again, "Ursel! Ursel!"

"Peace—Hush!" muttered the patient; "disturb not the blest in their ecstasy—nor again recall the most miserable of mortals to finish the draught of bitterness which his fate had compelled him to commence."

"Again, again," said the Emperor, aside to Douban, "try him yet again; it is of importance for me to know in what degree he possesses his senses, or in what measure they have disappeared from him."

"I would not, however," said the physician, "be the rash and guilty person, who, by an ill-timed urgency, should produce a total alienation of mind, and plunge him back either into absolute lunacy, or produce a stupor, in which he might remain for a long period."

“ Surely not,” replied the Emperor ; “ my commands are those of one Christian to another, nor do I wish them farther obeyed than as they are consistent with the laws of God and man.”

He paused for a moment after this declaration, and yet but few minutes had elapsed ere he again urged the leech to pursue the interrogation of his patient. “ If you hold me not competent,” said Douban, somewhat vain of the trust necessarily reposed in him, “ to judge of the treatment of my patient, your Imperial Highness must take the risk and the trouble upon yourself.”

“ Marry, I shall,” said the Emperor, “ for the scruples of leeches are not to be indulged, when the fate of kingdoms and the lives of monarchs are placed against them in the scales.— Rouse thee, my noble Ursel ! hear a voice, with which thy ears were once well acquainted, welcome thee back to glory and command ! Look around thee, and see how the world smiles to welcome thee back from imprisonment to empire !”

“ Cunning fiend !” said Ursel, “ who usést

the most wily baits in order to augment the misery of the wretched! Know, tempter, that I am conscious of the whole trick of the soothing images of last night,—thy baths—thy beds—and thy bowers of bliss—But sooner shalt thou be able to bring a smile upon the cheek of St. Anthony the Eremite, than induce me to curl mine after the fashion of earthly voluptuaries.”

“Try it, foolish man,” insisted the Emperor, “and trust to the evidence of thy senses for the reality of the pleasures by which thou art now surrounded; or, if thou art obstinate in thy lack of faith, tarry as thou art for a single moment, and I will bring with me a being so unparalleled in her loveliness, that a single glance of her were worth the restoration of thine eyes, were it only to look upon her for a moment.” So saying he left the apartment.

“Traitor,” said Ursel, “and deceiver of old, bring no one hither! and strive not, by shadowy and ideal forms of beauty, to increase the delusion that gilds my prison-house for a moment; in order, doubtless, to destroy totally the spark of reason, and then exchange this earthly hell

for a dungeon in the infernal regions themselves!"

"His mind is somewhat shattered," mused the physician, "which is often the consequence of a long solitary confinement. I marvel much," was his farther thought, "if the Emperor can shape out any rational service which this man can render him, after being so long immured in so horrible a dungeon.—Thou thinkest, then," continued he, addressing the patient, "that the seeming release of last night, with its baths and refreshments, was only a delusive dream, without any reality?"

"Ay—what else?" answered Ursel.

"And that the arousing thyself, as we desire thee to do, would be but a resigning to a vain temptation, in order to wake to more unhappiness than formerly?"

"Even so," returned the patient.

"What, then, are thy thoughts of the Emperor, by whose command thou sufferest so severe a restraint?"

Perhaps Douban wished he had forborne this question, for, in the very moment when he put

it, the door of the chamber opened, and the Emperor entered, with his daughter hanging upon his arm, dressed with simplicity, yet with becoming splendour. She had found time, it seems, to change her dress for a white robe, which resembled a kind of mourning, the chief ornament of which was a diamond chaplet, of inestimable value, which surrounded and bound the long sable tresses, that reached from her head to her waist. Terrified almost to death, she had been surprised by her father in the company of her husband the Cæsar, and her mother; and the same thundering mandate had at once ordered Briennius, in the character of a more than suspected traitor, under the custody of a strong guard of Varangians, and commanded her to attend her father to the bedchamber of Ursel, in which she now stood; resolved, however, that she would stick by the sinking fortunes of her husband, even in the last extremity, yet no less determined that she would not rely upon her own entreaties or remonstrances, until she should see whether her father's interference was likely to reassume a resolved and positive character. Has-

tily as the plans of Alexius had been formed, and hastily as they had been disconcerted by accident, there remained no slight chance that he might be forced to come round to the purpose on which his wife and daughter had fixed their heart, the forgiveness, namely, of the guilty Nicephorus Briennius. To his astonishment, and not perhaps greatly to his satisfaction, he heard the patient deeply engaged with the physician in canvassing his own character.

“ Think not,” said Ursel in reply to him, “ that though I am immured in this dungeon, and treated as something worse than an outcast of humanity—and although I am, moreover, deprived of my eyesight, the dearest gift of Heaven—think not, I say, though I suffer all this by the cruel will of Alexius Comnenus, that therefore I hold him to be mine enemy ; on the contrary, it is by his means that the blinded and miserable prisoner has been taught to seek a liberty far more unconstrained than this poor earth can afford, and a vision far more clear than any Mount Pisgah on this wretched side of the grave can give us : Shall I therefore accoutnt the

Emperor among mine enemies? He who has taught me the vanity of earthly things—the nothingness of earthly enjoyments—and the pure hope of a better world, as a certain exchange for the misery of the present? No!”

The Emperor had stood somewhat disconcerted at the beginning of this speech, but hearing it so very unexpectedly terminate, as he was willing to suppose, much in his own favour, he threw himself into an attitude which was partly that of a modest person listening to his own praises, and partly that of a man highly struck with the commendations heaped upon him by a generous adversary.

“My friend,” he said aloud, “how truly do you read my purpose, when you suppose that the knowledge which men of your disposition can extract from evil, was all the experience which I wished you to derive from a captivity protracted by adverse circumstances, far, very far, beyond my wishes! Let me embrace the generous man who knows so well how to construe the purpose of a perplexed, but still faithful friend.”

The patient raised himself in his bed.

“ Hold, there !” he said, “ methinks my faculties begin to collect themselves. Yes,” he muttered, “ that is the treacherous voice which first bid me welcome as a friend, and then commanded fiercely that I should be deprived of the sight of my eyes !—Increase thy rigour if thou wilt, Comnenus—add, if thou canst, to the torture of my confinement—but since I cannot see thy hypocritical and inhuman features, spare me, in mercy, the sound of a voice, more distressing to mine ear than toads, than serpents,—than whatever nature has most offensive and disgusting !”

This speech was delivered with so much energy, that it was in vain that the Emperor strove to interrupt its tenor ; although he himself, as well as Douhan and his daughter, heard a great deal more of the language of unadorned and natural passion than he had counted upon.

“ Raise thy head, rash man,” he said, “ and charm thy tongue, ere it proceed in a strain which may cost thee dear. Look at me, and see if I have not reserved a reward capable of

atoning for all the evil which thy folly may charge to my account."

Hitherto the prisoner had remained with his eyes obstinately shut, regarding the imperfect recollection he had of sights which had been before his eyes the foregoing evening, as the mere suggestion of a deluded imagination, if not actually presented by some seducing spirit. But now, when his eyes fairly encountered the stately figure of the Emperor, and the graceful form of his lovely daughter, painted in the tender rays of the morning dawn, he ejaculated faintly, "I see!—I see!"—And with that ejaculation fell back on the pillow in a swoon, which instantly found employment for Douban and his restoratives.

"A most wonderful cure indeed!" exclaimed the physician; "and the height of my wishes would be to possess such another miraculous restorative."

"Fool!" said the Emperor; "canst thou not conceive that what has never been taken away is restored with little difficulty? He was made," he said, lowering his voice, "to undergo

a painful operation, which led him to believe that the organs of sight were destroyed; and as light scarcely ever visited him, and when it did, only in doubtful and almost invisible glimmerings, the prevailing darkness, both physical and mental, that surrounded him, prevented him from being sensible of the existence of that precious faculty, of which he imagined himself bereft. Perhaps thou wilt ask my reason for inflicting upon him so strange a deception?—Simply it was, that being by it conceived incapable of reigning, his memory might pass out of the minds of the public, while, at the same time, I reserved his eyesight, that, in case occasion should call, it might be in my power once more to liberate him from his dungeon, and employ, as I now propose to do, his courage and talents in the service of the empire, to counterbalance those of other conspirators.”

“And can your imperial Highness,” said Douban, “hope that you have acquired this man’s duty and affection, by the conduct you have observed to him?”

“I cannot tell,” answered the Emperor;

“that must be as futurity shall determine. All I know, is, that it is no fault of mine, if Ursel does not reckon freedom and a long course of empire—perhaps sanctioned by an alliance with our own blood—and the continued enjoyment of the precious organs of eyesight, of which a less scrupulous man would have deprived him, against a maimed and darkened existence.”

“Since such is your Highness’s opinion and resolution,” said Douban, “it is for me to aid, and not to counteract it. Permit me, therefore, to pray your Highness and the Princess to withdraw, that I may use such remedies as may confirm a mind which has been so strangely shaken, and restore to him fully the use of those eyes, of which he has been so long deprived.”

“I am content, Douban,” said the Emperor; “but take notice, Ursel is not totally at liberty until he has expressed the resolution to become actually mine. It may behove both him and thee to know, that although there is no purpose of remitting him to the dungeons of the Blacquer-nal palace, yet if he, or any on his part, should aspire to head a party in these feverish times,—

by the honour of a gentleman, to swear a Frankish oath, he shall find that he is not out of the reach of the battle-axes of my Varangians. I trust to thee to communicate this fact, which concerns alike him and all who have interest in his fortunes.—Come, daughter, we will withdraw, and leave the leech with his patient.—Take notice, *Douban*, it is of importance that you acquaint me the very first moment when the patient can hold rational communication with me.”

Alexius and his accomplished daughter departed accordingly.

CHAPTER IV.

Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Bears yet a precious jewel in its head.

As You Like It.

FROM a terraced roof of the Blacquernal palace, accessible by a sash-door, which opened from the bedchamber of Ursel, there was commanded one of the most lovely and striking views which the romantic neighbourhood of Constantinople afforded.

After suffering him to repose and rest his agitated faculties, it was to this place that the physician led his patient; for when somewhat composed, he had of himself requested to be permitted to verify the truth of his restored eyesight, by looking out once more upon the majestic face of nature.

On the one hand, the scene which he beheld

was a masterpiece of human art. The proud city, ornamented with stately buildings, as became the capital of the world, showed a succession of glittering spires and orders of architecture, some of them chaste and simple, like those the capitals of which were borrowed from baskets-full of acanthus; some deriving the fluting of their shafts from the props made originally to support the lances of the earlier Greeks: forms simple, yet more graceful in their simplicity, than any which human ingenuity has been able since to invent. With the most splendid specimens which ancient art could afford of those strictly classical models were associated those of a later age, where more modern taste had endeavoured at improvement, and, by mixing the various orders, had produced such as were either composite, or totally out of rule. The size of the buildings in which they were displayed, however, procured them respect; nor could even the most perfect judge of architecture avoid being struck by the grandeur of their extent and effect, although hurt by the incorrectness of the taste in which they were executed. Arches of triumph, towers, obelisks,

and spires, designed for various purposes, rose up into the air in confused magnificence ; while the lower view was filled by the streets of the city, the domestic habitations forming long narrow alleys, on either side of which the houses arose to various and unequal heights, but, being generally finished with terraced coverings, thickset with plants and flowers, and fountains, had, when seen from an eminence, a more noble and interesting aspect than is ever afforded by the sloping and uniform roofs of streets in the capitals of the north of Europe.

It has taken us some time to give, in words, the idea which was at a single glance conveyed to Ursel, and affected him at first with great pain. His eyeballs had been long strangers to that daily exercise, which teaches us the habit of correcting the scenes as they appear to our sight, by the knowledge which we derive from the use of our other senses. His idea of distance was so confused, that it seemed as if all the spires, turrets and minarets which he beheld, were crowded forward upon his eyeballs, and almost touching them. With a shriek of horror, Ursel turned himself to

the further side, and cast his eyes upon a different scene. Here also he saw towers, steeples, and turrets, but they were those of the churches and public buildings beneath his feet, reflected from the dazzling piece of water which formed the harbour of Constantinople, and which, from the abundance of wealth which it transported to the city, was well termed the Golden Horn. In one place, this superb basin was lined with quays, where stately dromonds and argosies unloaded their wealth, while, by the shore of the haven, galleys, feluccas, and other small craft, idly flapped the singularly shaped and snow-white pinions which served them for sails. In other places, the Golden Horn lay shrouded in a verdant mantle of trees, where the private gardens of wealthy or distinguished individuals, or places of public recreation, shot down upon and were bounded by the glassy waters.

On the Bosphorus, which might be seen in the distance, the little fleet of Tancred was lying in the same station they had gained during the night, which was fitted to command the opposite landing: this their general had preferred to a

midnight descent upon Constantinople, not knowing whether, so coming, they might be received as friends or enemies. This delay, however, had given the Greeks an opportunity, either by the orders of Alexius, or the equally powerful mandates of some of the conspirators, to tow six ships of war, full of armed men, and provided with the maritime offensive weapons peculiar to the Greeks at that period, which they had moored so as exactly to cover the place where the troops of Tancred must necessarily land.

This preparation gave some surprise to the valiant Tancred, who did not know that such vessels had arrived in the harbour from Lemnos on the preceding night. The undaunted courage of that prince was, however, in no respect to be shaken by the degree of unexpected danger with which his adventure now appeared to be attended.

This splendid view, from the description of which we have in some degree digressed, was seen by the physician and Ursel from a terrace, the loftiest almost on the palace of the Blacquer-nal. To the cityward, it was bounded by a solid

wall, of considerable height, giving a resting-place for the roof of a lower building, which, sloping outward, broke to the view the vast height, unobscured otherwise save by a high and massy balustrade, composed of bronze, which, to the havenward, sunk sheer down upon an uninterrupted precipice.

No sooner, therefore, had Ursel turned his eyes that way, than, though placed far from the brink of the terrace, he exclaimed, with a shriek, "Save me—save me! if you are not indeed the destined executors of the Emperor's will."

"We are indeed such," said Douban, "to save, and if possible to bring you to complete recovery; but by no means to do you injury, or to suffer it to be offered by others."

"Guard me then from myself," said Ursel, "and save me from the reeling and insane desire which I feel to plunge myself into the abyss, to the edge of which you have guided me."

"Such a giddy and dangerous temptation is," said the physician, "common to those who have not for a long time looked down from precipitous heights, and are suddenly brought to them; Na-

ture, however bounteous, hath not provided for the cessation of our faculties for years, and for their sudden resumption in full strength and vigour. An interval, longer or shorter, must needs intervene. Can you not believe this terrace a safe station while you have my support and that of this faithful slave?"

"Certainly," said Ursel; "but permit me to turn my face towards this stone-wall, for I cannot bear to look at the flimsy piece of wire, which is the only battlement of defence that interposes betwixt me and the precipice." He spoke of the bronze balustrade, six feet high, and massive in proportion. Thus saying, and holding fast by the physician's arm, Ursel, though himself a younger and more able man, trembled; and moved his feet as slowly as if made of lead, until he reached the sashed-door, where there was placed a kind of balcony-seat, in which he placed himself.—"Here," he said, "will I remain."

"And here," said Douban, "will I make the communication of the Emperor, which it is necessary you should be prepared to reply to. If

places you, you will observe, at your own disposal for liberty or captivity, but it conditions for your resigning that sweet but sinful morsel termed revenge, which, I must not conceal from you, chance appears willing to put into your hand. You know the degree of rivalry in which you have been held by the Emperor, and you know the measure of evil you have sustained at his hand. The question is, Can you forgive what has taken place?"

"Let me wrap my head round with my mantle," said Ursel, "to dispel this dizziness which still oppresses my poor brain, and as soon as the power of recollection is granted to me, you shall know my sentiments."

He sunk upon the seat, muffled in the way which he described, and after a few minutes' reflection, with a trepidation which argued the patient still to be under the nervous feeling of extreme horror mixed with terror, he addressed Douban thus: "The operation of wrong and cruelty, in the moment when they are first inflicted, excites, of course, the utmost resentment of the sufferer; nor is there, perhaps, a passion

which lives so long in his bosom as the natural desire of revenge. If, then, during the first month, when I lay stretched upon my bed of want and misery, you had offered me an opportunity of revenge upon my cruel oppressor, the remnant of miserable life which remained to me should have been willingly bestowed to purchase it. But a suffering of weeks, or even months, must not be compared in effect with that of years. For a short space of endurance, the body, as well as the mind, retains that vigorous habit which holds the prisoner still connected with life, and teaches him to thrill at the long-forgotten chain of hopes, of wishes, of disappointments, and mortifications, which affected his former existence. But the wounds become callous as they harden, and other and better feelings occupy their place, while they gradually die away in forgetfulness. The enjoyments, the amusements of this world, occupy no part of his time upon whom the gates of despair have once closed. I tell thee, my kind physician, that for a season, in an insane attempt to effect my liberty, I cut through a large portion of the living

rock. But Heaven cured me of so foolish an idea; and if I did not actually come to love Alexius Comnenus—for how could that have been a possible effect in any rational state of my intellects?—yet, as I became convinced of my own crimes, sins, and follies, the more and more I was also persuaded that Alexius was but the agent through whom Heaven exercised a dearly-purchased right of punishing me for my manifold offences and transgressions; and that it was not therefore upon the Emperor that my resentment ought to visit itself. And, I can now say to thee, that, so far as a man who has undergone so dreadful a change can be supposed to know his own mind, I feel no desire either to rival Alexius in a race for empire, or to avail myself of any of the various proffers which he proposes to me as the price of withdrawing my claim. Let him keep unpurchased the crown, for which he has paid, in my opinion, a price which it is not worth.”

“ This is extraordinary stoicism, noble Ursel,” answered the physician Douban. “ Am I then to understand that you reject the fair offers

of Alexius, and desire, instead of all which he is willing—nay, anxious to bestow—to be committed safely back to thy old blinded dungeon in the Blacquernal, that you may continue at ease those pietistic meditations which have already conducted thee to so extravagant a conclusion?”

“Physician,” said Ursel, while a shuddering fit that affected his whole body testified his alarm at the alternative proposed—“one would imagine thine own profession might have taught thee, that no mere mortal man, unless predestined to be a glorified saint, could ever prefer darkness to the light of day; blindness itself to the enjoyment of the power of sight; the pangs of starving to competent sustenance, or the damps of a dungeon to the free air of God’s creation. No!—it may be virtue to do so, but to such a pitch mine does not soar. All I require of the Emperor for standing by him with all the power my name can give him at this crisis is, that he will provide for my reception as a monk in some of those pleasant and well-endowed seminaries of piety, to which his devotion, or his fears, have

given rise. Let me not be again the object of his suspicion, the operation of which is more dreadful than that of being the object of his hate. Forgotten by power, as I have myself lost the remembrance of those that wielded it, let me find my way to the grave, unnoticed, unconstrained, at liberty, in possession of my dim and disused organs of sight, and, above all, at peace."

"If such be thy serious and earnest wish, noble Ursel," said the physician, "I myself have no hesitation to warrant to thee the full accomplishment of thy religious and moderate desires. But, bethink thee, thou art once more an inhabitant of the court, in which thou mayst obtain what thou wilt to-day; while to-morrow, shouldst thou regret thy indifference, it may be thy utmost entreaty will not suffice to gain for thee the slightest extension of thy present conditions."

"Be it so," said Ursel; "I will then stipulate for another condition, which indeed has only reference to this day. I will solicit his Imperial Majesty, with all humility, to spare me the pain of a personal treaty between himself and me; and that he will be satisfied with the solemn as-

surance that I am most willing to do in his favour all that he is desirous of dictating; while, on the other hand, I desire only the execution of those moderate conditions of my future aliment which I have already told thee at length."

"But wherefore," said Douban, "shouldst thou be afraid of announcing to the Emperor thy disposition to an agreement, which cannot be esteemed otherwise than extremely moderate on thy part? Indeed, I fear the Emperor will insist on a brief personal conference."

"I am not ashamed," said Ursel, "to confess the truth. It is true, that I have, or think I have, renounced what the Scripture calls the pride of life; but the old Adam still lives within us, and maintains against the better part of our nature an inextinguishable quarrel, easy to be aroused from its slumber, but as difficult to be again couched in peace. While last night I but half understood that mine enemy was in my presence, and while my faculties performed but half their duty in recalling his deceitful and hated accents, did not my heart throb in my bosom with all the agitation of a taken bird, and shall

I again have to enter into a personal treaty with the man who, be his general conduct what it may, has been the constant and unprovoked cause of my unequalled misery? Douban, no!—to listen to his voice again, were to hear an alarm sounded to every violent and vindictive passion of my heart; and though, may Heaven so help me as my intentions towards him are upright, yet it is impossible for me to listen to his professions with a chance of safety either to him or to myself.”

“If you be so minded,” replied Douban, “I shall only repeat to him your stipulation, and you must swear to him that you will strictly observe it. Without this being done, it must be difficult, or perhaps impossible, to settle the league of which both are desirous.”

“Amen!” said Ursel; “and as I am pure in my purpose, and resolved to keep it to the uttermost, so may Heaven guard me from the influence of precipitate revenge, ancient grudge, or new quarrel!”

An authoritative knock at the door of the sleeping-chamber was now heard, and Ursel, re-

lieved, by more powerful feelings, from the giddiness of which he had complained, walked firmly into the bedroom, and seating himself, waited with averted eyes the entrance of the person who demanded admittance, and who proved to be no other than Alexius Comnenus.

The Emperor appeared at the door in a warlike dress, suited for the decoration of a prince who was to witness a combat in the lists fought out before him.

“ Sage Douban,” he said, “ has our esteemed prisoner, Ursel, made his choice between our peace and enmity ?”

“ He hath, my lord,” replied the physician, “ embraced the lot of that happy portion of mankind, whose hearts and lives are devoted to the service of your Majesty’s government.”

“ He will then this day,” continued the Emperor, “ render me the office of putting down all those who may pretend to abet insurrection in his name, and under pretext of his wrongs ?”

“ He will, my lord,” replied the physician, “ act to the fullest the part which you require.”

“ And in what way,” said the Emperor, adopt-

ing his most gracious tone of voice, "would our faithful Ursel desire that services like these, rendered in the hour of extreme need, should be acknowledged by the Emperor?"

"Simply," answered Douban, "by saying nothing upon the subject. He desires only that all jealousies between you and him may be henceforth forgotten, and that he may be admitted into one of your Highness's monastic institutions; with leave to dedicate the rest of his life to the worship of Heaven and its saints."

"Hath he persuaded thee of this, Douban?" — said the Emperor, in a low and altered voice; "By Heaven! when I consider from what prison he was brought, and in what guise he inhabited it, I cannot believe in this gall-less disposition. He must at least speak to me himself, ere I can believe, in some degree, the transformation of the fiery Ursel into a being so little capable of feeling the ordinary impulses of mankind."

"Hear me, Alexius Comnenus," said the prisoner; "and so may thine own prayers to Heaven find access and acceptance, as thou be-

lievest the words which I speak to thee in simplicity of heart. If thine empire of Greece were made of coined gold, it would hold out no bait for my acceptance ; nor, I thank Heaven, have even the injuries I have experienced at thy hand, cruel and extensive as they have been, impressed upon me the slightest desire of requiting treachery with treachery. Think of me as thou wilt, so thou seek'st not again to exchange words with me ; and believe me, that when thou hast put me under the most rigid of thy ecclesiastical foundations, the discipline, the fast, and the vigils, will be far superior to the existence falling to the share of those whom the King delights to honour, and who therefore must afford the King their society whenever they are summoned to do so."

"It is hardly for me," said the physician, "to interpose in so high a matter ; yet, as trusted both by the noble Ursel, and by his highness the Emperor, I have made a brief abstract of these short conditions to be kept by the high parties towards each other, *sub crimine falsi*."

The Emperor protracted the intercourse with Ursel, until he more fully explained to him the

occasion which he should have that very day for his services. When they parted, Alexius, with a great show of affection, embraced his late prisoner, while it required all the self-command and stoicism of Ursel to avoid expressing in plain terms the extent to which he abhorred the person who thus caressed him.

CHAPTER V.

. O, Conspiracy!
 Sham'st thou to show thy dangerous brow by night,
 When evils are most free? O, then, by day,
 Where wilt thou find a cavern dark enough
 To mask thy monstrous visage? Seek none, Conspiracy;
 Hide it in smiles and affability:
 For if thou path, thy native semblance on,
 Not Erebus itself were dim enough
 To hide thee from prevention.

Julius Cæsar.

THE important morning at last arrived, on which, by the Imperial proclamation, the combat between the Cæsar and Robert Count of Paris was appointed to take place. This was a circumstance in a great measure foreign to the Grecian manners, and to which, therefore, the people annexed different ideas from those which were associated with the same solemn decision of God, as the Latins called it, by the Western nations. The consequence was a vague, but excessive agitation among the people, who connected the extraordinary strife which they were

to witness, with the various causes which had been whispered abroad, as likely to give occasion to some general insurrection of a great and terrible nature.

By the Imperial order, regular lists had been prepared for the combat, with opposite gates, or entrances, as was usual, for the admittance of the two champions; and it was understood that the appeal was to be made to the Divinity by each, according to the forms prescribed by the church of which the combatants were respectively members. The situation of these lists was on the side of the shore adjoining on the west to the continent. At no great distance, the walls of the city were seen, of various architecture, composed of lime and of stone, and furnished with no less than four-and-twenty gates, or posterns, five of which regarded the land, and nineteen the water. All this formed a beautiful prospect, much of which is still visible. The town itself is about nineteen miles in circumference; and as it is on all sides surrounded with lofty cypresses, its general appearance is that of a city arising out of a stately wood of these magnificent trees,

partly shrouding the pinnacles, obelisks, and minarets, which then marked the site of many noble Christian temples; but now, generally speaking, intimate the position of as many Mahomedan mosques.

These lists, for the convenience of spectators, were surrounded on all sides by long rows of seats, sloping downwards. In the middle of these seats, and exactly opposite the centre of the lists, was a high throne, erected for the Emperor himself; and which was separated from the more vulgar galleries by a circuit of wooden barricades, which an experienced eye could perceive, might, in case of need, be made serviceable for purposes of defence.

The lists were sixty yards in length, by perhaps about forty in breadth, and these afforded ample space for the exercise of the combat, both on horseback and on foot. Numerous bands of the Greek citizens began, with the very break of day, to issue from the gates and posterns of the city, to examine and wonder at the construction of the lists, pass their criticisms upon the purposes of the peculiar parts of the fabric, and occupy

places, to secure them for the spectacle. Shortly after arrived a large band of those soldiers who were called the Roman Immortals. These entered without ceremony, and placed themselves on either hand of the wooden barricade which fenced the Emperor's seat. Some of them took even a greater liberty; for, affecting to be pressed against the boundary, there were individuals who approached the partition itself, and seemed to meditate climbing over it, and placing themselves on the same side with the Emperor. Some old domestic slaves of the household now showed themselves, as if for the purpose of preserving this sacred circle for Alexius and his court; and, in proportion as the Immortals began to show themselves encroaching and turbulent, the strength of the defenders of the prohibited precincts seemed gradually to increase.

There was, though scarcely to be observed, besides the grand access to the Imperial seat from without, another opening also from the outside, secured by a very strong door, by which different persons received admission beneath the seats destined for the Imperial party. These per-

sons, by their length of limb, breadth of shoulders, by the fur of their cloaks, and especially by the redoubted battle-axes which all of them bore, appeared to be Varangians; but, although neither dressed in their usual habit of pomp, or in their more effectual garb of war, still, when narrowly examined, they might be seen to possess their usual offensive weapons. These men, entering in separate and straggling parties, might be observed to join the slaves of the interior of the palace in opposing the intrusion of the Immortals upon the seat of the Emperor and the benches around. Two or three Immortals, who had actually made good their frolic, and climbed over the division, were flung back again, very unceremoniously, by the barbaric strength and sinewy arms of the Varangians.

The people around, and in the adjacent galleries, most of whom had the air of citizens in their holyday dresses, commented a good deal on these proceedings, and were inclined strongly to make part with the Immortals. "It was a shame to the Emperor," they said, "to encourage these British barbarians to interpose themselves by

violence between his person and the Immortal cohorts of the city, who were in some sort his own children."

Stephanos, the gymnastic, whose bulky strength and stature rendered him conspicuous amid this party, said, without hesitation, "If there are two people here who will join in saying that the Immortals are unjustly deprived of their right of guarding the Emperor's person, here is the hand that shall place them beside the Imperial chair."

"Not so," quoth a centurion of the Immortals, whom we have already introduced to our readers by the name of Harpax; "Not so, Stephanos; that happy time may arrive, but it is not yet come, my gem of the circus. Thou knowest that on this occasion it is one of these Counts, or western Franks, who undertakes the combat; and the Varangians, who call these people their enemies, have some reason to claim a precedence in guarding the lists, which it might not at this moment be convenient to dispute with them. Why, man, if thou wert half so witty as thou art long, thou wouldst be sensible that it were

bad woodmanship to raise the hollo upon the game, ere it had been driven within compass of he nets."

While the athlete rolled his huge grey eyes as if to conjure out the sense of this intimation, his little friend Lysimachus, the artist, putting himself to pain to stand upon his tiptoe, and look intelligent, said, approaching as near as he could to Harpax's ear, "Thou mayst trust me, gallant centurion, that this man of mould and muscle shall neither start like a babbling hound on a false scent, nor become mute and inert when the general signal is given. But tell me," said he, speaking very low, and for that purpose mounting a bench, which brought him on a level with the centurion's ear, "would it not have been better that a strong guard of the valiant Immortals had been placed in this wooden citadel, to ensure the object of the day?"

"Without question," said the centurion, "it was so meant; but these strolling Varangians have altered their station of their own authority."

"Were it not well," said Lysimachus, "that you, who are greatly more numerous than the



barbarians, should begin a fray before more of these strangers arrive?"

"Content ye, friend," said the centurion, coldly, "we know our time. An attack commenced too early would be worse than thrown away, nor would an opportunity occur of executing our project in the fitting time, if an alarm were prematurely given at this moment."

So saying, he shuffled off among his fellow soldiers, so as to avoid suspicious intercourse with such persons as were only concerned with the civic portion of the conspirators.

As the morning advanced, and the sun took a higher station in the horizon, the various persons whom curiosity, or some more decided motive, brought to see the proposed combat, were seen streaming from different parts of the town, and rushing to occupy such accommodation as the circuit round the lists afforded them. In their road to the place where preparation for combat was made, they had to ascend a sort of cape, which, in the form of a small hill, projected into the Hellespont, and the but of which, con-

necting it with the shore, afforded a considerable ascent, and of course a more commanding view of the strait between Europe and Asia, than either the immediate vicinity of the city, or the still lower ground upon which the lists were erected. In passing this height, the earlier visitants of the lists made little or no halt; but after a time, when it became obvious that those who had hurried forward to the place of combat were lingering there without any object or occupation, they that followed them in the same route, with natural curiosity, paid a tribute to the landscape, bestowing some attention on its beauty, and paused to see what auguries could be collected from the water, which were likely to have any concern in indicating the fate of the events that were to take place. Some straggling seamen were the first who remarked that a squadron of the Greek small craft (being that of Tancred) were in the act of making their way from Asia, and threatening the descent upon Constantinople.

“It is strange,” said a person, by rank the

captain of a galley, "that these small vessels, which were ordered to return to Constantinople as soon as they disembarked the Latins, should have remained so long at Scutari, and should not be rowing back to the imperial city until this time, on the second day after their departure from thence."

"I pray to Heaven," said another of the same profession, "that these seamen may come alone. It seems to me as if their ensign-staffs, bowsprits, and topmasts, were decorated with the same ensigns, or nearly the same, with those which the Latins displayed upon them, when, by the Emperor's order, they were transported towards Palestine; so methinks the voyage back again resembles that of a fleet of merchant vessels, who have been prevented from discharging their cargo at the place of their destination."

"There is little good," said one of the politicians whom we formerly noticed, "in dealing with such commodities, whether they are imported or exported. Yon ample banner which streams over the foremost galley, intimates the presence of a chieftain of no small rank among

the Counts, whether it be for valour or for nobility."

The seafaring leader added, with the voice of one who hints alarming tidings, "They seem to have got to a point in the straits as high as will enable them to run down with the tide, and clear the cape which we stand on, although with what purpose they aim to land so close beneath the walls of the city, he is a wiser man than I who pretends to determine."

"Assuredly," returned his comrade, "the intention is not a kind one. The wealth of the city has temptations to a poor people, who only value the iron which they possess as affording them the means of procuring the gold which they covet."

"Ay, brother," answered Demetrius the politician, "but see you not, lying at anchor within this bay which is formed by the cape, and at the very point where these heretics are likely to be carried by the tide, six strong vessels, having the power of sending forth, not merely showers of darts and arrows, but of Grecian fire, as it is called, from their hollow decks? If these Frank

gentry continue directing their course upon the Imperial city, being, as they are,

———' propago

Contemptrix Superûm sané, sævæque avidissima cædis,
Et violenta ;**

we shall speedily see a combat better worth witnessing than that announced by the great trumpet of the Varangians. If you love me, let us sit down here for a moment, and see how this matter is to end."

"An excellent motion, my ingenious friend," said Lascaris, which was the name of the other citizen; "but, bethink you, shall we not be in danger from the missiles with which the audacious Latins will not fail to return the Greek fire, if, according to your conjecture, it shall be poured upon them by the Imperial squadron?"

"That is not ill argued, my friend," said Demetrius; "but know that you have to do with a man who has been in such extremities before now; and if such a discharge should open from

* Ovid Met.

the sea, I would propose to you to step back some fifty yards inland, and thus to interpose the very crest of the cape between us and the discharge of missiles ; a mere child might thus learn to face them without any alarm."

" You are a wise man, neighbour," said Lascaris, " and possess such a mixture of valour and knowledge as becomes a man whom a friend might be supposed safely to risk his life with. There be those, for instance, who cannot show you the slightest glimpse of what is going on, without bringing you within peril of your life ; whereas you, my worthy friend Demetrius, between your accurate knowledge of military affairs, and your regard for your friend, are sure to show him all that is to be seen without the least risk to a person, who is naturally unwilling to think of exposing himself to injury.—But, Holy Virgin ! what is the meaning of that red flag which the Greek Admiral has this instant hoisted ?"

" Why, you see, neighbour," answered Demetrius, " yonder western heretic continues to advance without minding the various signs which

our Admiral has made to him to desist, and now he hoists the bloody colours, as if a man should clench his fist and say, If you persevere in your uncivil intention, I will do so and so."

"By St Sophia," said Lascaris, "and that is giving him fair warning. But what is it the Imperial Admiral is about to do?"

"Run! run! friend Lascaris," said Demetrius, "or you will see more of that than perchance you have any curiosity for."

Accordingly, to add the strength of example to precept, Demetrius himself girt up his loins, and retreated with the most edifying speed to the opposite side of the ridge, accompanied by the greater part of the crowd, who had tarried there to witness the contest which the newsmonger promised, and were determined to take his word for their own safety. The sound and sight which had alarmed Demetrius, was the discharge of a large portion of Greek fire, which perhaps may be best compared to one of those immense Congreve rockets of the present day, which takes on its shoulders a small grapnel or anchor, and proceeds groaning through the air, like a fiend over-

burdened by the mandate of some inexorable magician, and of which the operation was so terrifying, that the crews of the vessels attacked by this strange weapon frequently forsook every means of defence, and run themselves ashore. One of the principal ingredients of this dreadful fire was supposed to be naphtha, or the bitumen which is collected on the banks of the Dead Sea, and which, when in a state of ignition, could only be extinguished by a very singular mixture, and which it was not likely to come in contact with. It produced a thick smoke and loud explosion, and was capable, says Gibbon, of communicating its flames with equal vehemence in descent or lateral progress. In sieges, it was poured from the ramparts, or launched, like our bombs, in red-hot balls of stone or iron, or it was darted in flax twisted round arrows and in javelins. It was considered as a state secret of the greatest importance; and for wellnigh four centuries it was unknown to the Mahometans. But at length the composition was discovered by the Saracens, and used by them for repelling the Crusaders, and overpowering the Greeks, upon whose side

it had at one time been the most formidable implement of defence. Some exaggeration we must allow for a barbarous period ; but there seems no doubt that the general description of the crusader Joinville should be admitted as correct :—“ It came flying through the air,” says that good knight, “ like a winged dragon, about the thickness of a hogshead, with the report of thunder and the speed of lightning, and the darkness of the night was dispelled by this horrible illumination.”

Not only the bold Demetrius and his pupil Lascaris, but all the crowd whom they influenced, fled manfully when the commodore of the Greeks fired the first discharge ; and as the other vessels in the squadron followed his example, the heavens were filled with the unusual and outrageous noise, while the smoke was so thick as to darken the very air. As the fugitives passed the crest of the hill, they saw the seaman, whom we formerly mentioned as a spectator, snugly reclining under cover of a dry ditch, where he managed so as to secure himself as far as possible from any accident. He could not,

however, omit breaking his jest on the politicians.

“What, ho!” he cried, “my good friends,” without raising himself above the counterscarp of his ditch, “will you not remain upon your station long enough to finish that hopeful lecture upon battle by sea and land, which you had so happy an opportunity of commencing? Believe me, the noise is more alarming than hurtful; the fire is all pointed in a direction opposite to yours, and if one of those dragons which you see does happen to fly landward instead of seaward, it is but the mistake of some cabin-boy, who has used his linstock with more willingness than ability.”

Demetrius and Lascaris just heard enough of the naval hero's harangue, to acquaint them with the new danger with which they might be assailed by the possible misdirection of the weapons, and, rushing down towards the lists at the head of a crowd half desperate with fear, they hastily propagated the appalling news, that the Latins were coming back from Asia with the purpose

of landing in arms, pillaging, and burning the city.

The uproar, in the meantime, of this unexpected occurrence, was such as altogether to vindicate, in public opinion, the reported cause, however exaggerated. The thunder of the Greek fire came successively, one hard upon the other, and each, in its turn, spread a blot of black smoke upon the face of the landscape, which, thickened by so many successive clouds, seemed at last, like that raised by a sustained fire of modern artillery, to overshadow the whole horizon.

The small squadron of Tancred were completely hid from view in the surging volumes of darkness, which the breath of the weapons of the enemy had spread around him; and it seemed by a red light, which began to show itself among the thickest of the veil of darkness, that one of the flotilla at least had caught fire. Yet the Latins resisted, with an obstinacy worthy of their own courage, and the fame of their celebrated leader. Some advantage they had, on account of their small size, and their lowness in the water, as well

as the clouded state of the atmosphere, which rendered them difficult marks for the fire of the Greeks.

To increase these advantages, Tancred, as well by boats as by the kind of rude signals made use of at that period, dispersed orders to his fleet, that each bark, disregarding the fate of the others, should press forward individually, and that the men from each should be put on shore wheresoever and howsoever they could effect that manœuvre. Tancred himself set a noble example; he was on board a stout vessel, fenced in some degree against the effect of the Greek fire by being in a great measure covered with raw hides, which hides had also been recently steeped in water. This vessel contained upwards of a hundred valiant warriors, several of them of knightly order, who had all night toiled at the humble labours of the oar, and now in the morning applied their chivalrous hands to the arblast and to the bow, which were in general accounted the weapons of persons of a lower rank. Thus armed, and thus manned, Prince Tancred bestowed upon his bark the full velocity

which wind, and tide, and oar, could enable her to obtain, and placing her in the situation to profit by them as much as his maritime skill could direct, he drove with the speed of lightning among the vessels of Lemnos, plying on either side, bows, crossbows, javelins, and military missiles of every kind, with the greater advantage that the Greeks, trusting to their artificial fire, had omitted arming themselves with other weapons; so that when the valiant Crusader bore down on them with so much fury, repaying the terrors of their fire with a storm of bolts and arrows no less formidable, they began to feel that their own advantage was much less than they had supposed, and that, like most other dangers, the maritime fire of the Greeks, when undauntedly confronted, lost at least one-half of its terrors. The Grecian sailors, too, when they observed the vessels approach so near, filled with the steel-clad Latins, began to shrink from a contest to be maintained hand to hand with so terrible an enemy.

By degrees, smoke began to issue from the sides of the great Grecian argosie, and the voice

of Tancred announced to his soldiers that the Grecian Admiral's vessel had taken fire, owing to negligence in the management of the means of destruction she possessed, and that all they had now to do was to maintain such a distance as to avoid sharing her fate. Sparkles and flashes of flame were next seen leaping from place to place, on board of the great hulk, as if the element had had the sense and purpose of spreading wider the consternation, and disabling the few who still paid attention to the commands of their Admiral, and endeavoured to extinguish the fire. The consciousness of the combustible nature of the freight began to add despair to terror; from the bolt-sprit, the rigging, the yards, the sides, and every part of the vessel, the unfortunate crew were seen dropping themselves, to exchange for the most part a watery death for one by the more dreadful agency of fire. The crew of Tancred's bark, ceasing, by that generous prince's commands, to offer any additional annoyance to an enemy who was at once threatened by the perils of the ocean and of conflagration, ran their vessel ashore in a smooth part of the bay, and jump-

ing into the shallow sea, made the land without difficulty; many of their steeds being, by the exertions of the owners, and the docility of the animals, brought ashore at the same time with their masters. Their commander lost no time in forming their serried ranks into a phalanx of lancers, few indeed at first, but perpetually increasing as ship after ship of the little flotilla ran ashore, or having more deliberately moored their barks, landed their men, and joined their companions.

The cloud which had been raised by the conflict was now driven to leeward before the wind, and the strait exhibited only the relics of the combat. Here tossed upon the billows the scattered and broken remains of one or two of the Latin vessels which had been burnt at the commencement of the combat, though their crews, by the exertions of their comrades, had in general been saved. Lower down were seen the remaining five vessels of the Lemnos squadron, holding a disorderly and difficult retreat, with the purpose of gaining the harbour of Constantinople. In the place so late the scene of com-

bat, lay moored the hulk of the Grecian Admiral, burnt to the water's edge, and still sending forth a black smoke from its scathed beams and planks. The flotilla of Tancred, busied in discharging its troops, lay irregularly scattered along the bay, the men making ashore as they could, and taking their course to join the standard of their leader. Various black substances floated on the surface of the water, nearer, or more distant to the shore ; some proved to be the wreck of the vessels which had been destroyed, and others, more ominous still, the lifeless bodies of mariners who had fallen in the conflict.

The standard had been borne ashore by the Prince's favourite page, Ernest of Apulia, so soon as the keel of Tancred's galley had grazed upon the sand. It was then pitched on the top of that elevated cape between Constantinople and the lists, where Lascaris, Demetrius, and other gossips, had held their station at the commencement of the engagement, but from which all had fled, between the mingled dread of the Greek fire and the missiles of the Latin crusaders.

CHAPTER VI.

SHEATHED in complete armour, and supporting with his right hand the standard of his fathers, Tancred remained with his handful of warriors like so many statues of steel, expecting some sort of attack from the Grecian party which had occupied the lists, or from the numbers whom the city gates began now to pour forth—soldiers some of them, and others citizens, many of whom were arrayed as if for conflict. These persons, alarmed by the various accounts which were given of the combatants, and the progress of the fight, rushed towards the standard of Prince Tancred, with the intention of beating it to the earth, and dispersing the guards who owed it homage and defence. But if the reader shall have happened to have ridden at any time through a pastoral country, with a dog of a noble

race following him, he must have remarked, in the deference ultimately paid to the high-bred animal by the shepherd's cur as he crosses the lonely glen, of which the latter conceives himself the lord and guardian, something very similar to the demeanour of the incensed Greeks, when they approached near to the little band of Franks. At the first symptom of the intrusion of a stranger, the dog of the shepherd starts from his slumbers, and rushes towards the noble intruder with a clamorous declaration of war; but when the diminution of distance between them shows to the aggressor the size and strength of his opponent, he becomes like a cruiser, who, in a chase, has, to his surprise and alarm, found two tier of guns opposed to him instead of one. He halts—suspends his clamorous yelping, and, in fine, ingloriously retreats to his master, with all the dishonourable marks of positively declining the combat.

It was in this manner that the troops of the noisy Greeks, with much hallooing and many a boastful shout, hastened both from the town and from the lists, with the apparent intention of

sweeping from the field the few companions of Tancred. As they advanced, however, within the power of remarking the calm and regular order of those men who had landed, and arranged themselves under this noble chieftain's banner, their minds were altogether changed as to the resolution of instant combat; their advance became an uncertain and staggering gait; their heads were more frequently turned back to the point from which they came, than towards the enemy; and their desire to provoke an instant scuffle vanished totally, when there did not appear the least symptom that their opponents cared about the matter.

It added to the extreme confidence with which the Latins kept their ground, that they were receiving frequent, though small reinforcements from their comrades, who were landing by detachments all along the beach; and that, in the course of a short hour, their amount had been raised, on horseback and foot, to a number, allowing for a few casualties, not much less than that which set sail from Scutari.

Another reason why the Latins remained un-

assailed, was certainly the indisposition of the two principal armed parties on shore to enter into a quarrel with them. The guards of every kind, who were faithful to the Emperor, and more especially the Varangians, had their orders to remain firm at their posts, some in the lists, and others at various places of rendezvous in Constantinople, where their presence was necessary to prevent the effects of the sudden insurrection which Alexius knew to be meditated against him. These therefore made no hostile demonstration towards the band of Latins, nor was it the purpose of the Emperor they should do so.

On the other hand, the greater part of the Immortal Guards, and those citizens who were prepared to play a part in the conspiracy, had been impressed by the agents of the deceased Agelastes with the opinion, that this band of Latins, commanded by Tancred, the relative of Bohemond, had been dispatched by the latter to their assistance. These men, therefore, stood still, and made no attempt to guide or direct the popular efforts of such as inclined to attack

these unexpected visitors ; in which purpose, therefore, no very great party were united, while the majority were willing enough to find an apology for remaining quiet.

In the meantime, the Emperor, from his palace of Blacquernal, observed what passed upon the straits, and beheld his navy from Lemnos totally foiled in their attempt, by means of the Greek fire, to check the intended passage of Tancred and his men. He had no sooner seen the leading ship of this squadron begin to beacon the darkness with its own fire, than the Emperor formed a secret resolution to disown the unfortunate Admiral, and make peace with the Latins, if that should be absolutely necessary, by sending them his head. He had hardly, therefore, seen the flames burst forth, and the rest of the vessels retreat from their moorings, than in his own mind, the doom of the unfortunate Phraortes, for such was the name of the Admiral, was signed and sealed.

- Achilles Tattius, at the same instant, determining to keep a close eye upon the Emperor at

this important crisis, came precipitately into the palace, with an appearance of great alarm.

“ My Lord !—my Imperial Lord ! I am unhappy to be the messenger of such unlucky news ; but the Latins have in great numbers succeeded in crossing the strait from Scutari. The Lemnos squadron endeavoured to stop them, as was last night determined upon in the Imperial Council of War. By a heavy discharge of the Greek fire, one or two of the crusaders’ vessels were consumed, but by far the greater number of them pushed on their course, burnt the leading ship of the unfortunate Phraortes, and it is strongly reported he has himself perished, with almost all his men. The rest have cut their cables, and abandoned the defence of the passage of the Hellespont.”

“ And you, Achilles Tatius,” said the Emperor, “ with what purpose is it that you now bring me this melancholy news, at a period so late when I cannot amend the consequences ?”

“ Under favour, most gracious Emperor,” replied the conspirator, not without colouring and stammering, “ such was not my intention—I

had hoped to submit a plan, by which I might easily have prepared the way for correcting this little error."

"Well, your plan, sir?" said the Emperor dryly.

"With your sacred Majesty's leave," said the Acolyte, "I would myself have undertaken instantly to lead against this Tancred and his Italians the battle-axes of the faithful Varangian guard, who will make no mere account of the small number of Franks who have come ashore, than the farmer holds of the hordes of rats and mice, and such like mischievous vermin, who have harboured in his granaries."

"And what mean you," said the Emperor, "that I am to do, while my Anglo-Saxons fight for my sake?"

"Your Majesty," replied Achilles, not exactly satisfied with the dry and caustic manner in which the Emperor addressed him, "may put yourself at the head of the Immortal cohorts of Constantinople; and I am your security, that you may either perfect the victory over the Latins, or at least redeem the most distant chance

of a defeat, by advancing at the head of this choice body of domestic troops, should the day appear doubtful."

"You, yourself, Achilles Tatius," returned the Emperor, "have repeatedly assured us, that these Immortals retain a perverse attachment to our rebel Ursel. How is it, then, you would have us intrust our defence to these bands, when we have engaged our valiant Varangians in the proposed conflict with the flower of the western army?—Did you think of this risk, Sir Follower?"

Achilles Tatius, much alarmed at an intimation indicative of his purpose being known, answered, "that in his haste he had been more anxious to recommend the plan which should expose his own person to the greater danger, than that perhaps which was most attended with personal safety to his Imperial Master."

"I thank you for so doing," said the Emperor; "you have anticipated my wishes, though it is not in my power at present to follow the advice you have given me. I would have been well contented, undoubtedly, had these Latins

measured their way over the strait again, as suggested by last night's council ; but since they have arrived, and stand embattled on our shores, it is better that we pay them with money and with spoil, than with the lives of our gallant subjects. We cannot, after all, believe that they come with any serious intention of doing us injury ; it is but the insane desire of witnessing feats of battle and single combat, which is to them the breath of their nostrils, that can have impelled them to this partial countermarch. I impose upon you, Achilles Tatius, combining the Proto-spathaire in the same commission with you, the duty of riding up to yonder standard, and learning of their chief, called the Prince Tancred, if he is there in person, the purpose of his return, and the cause of his entering into debate with Phraortes and the Lemnos squadron. If they send us any reasonable excuse, we shall not be averse to receive it at their hands ; for we have not made so many sacrifices for the preservation of peace, to break forth into war, if, after all, so great an evil can be avoided. Thou wilt receive, therefore, with a candid and com-

placent mind, such apologies as they may incline to bring forward; and, be assured, that the sight of this puppet-show of a single combat, will be enough of itself to banish every other consideration from the reflection of these giddy crusaders."

A knock was at this moment heard at the door of the Emperor's apartment; and upon the word being given to enter, the Proto-spathaire made his appearance. He was arrayed in a splendid suit of ancient Roman-fashioned armour. The want of a visor left his countenance entirely visible; which, pale and anxious as it was, did not well become the martial crest and dancing plume with which it was decorated. He received the commission already mentioned with the less alacrity, because the Acolyte was added to him as his colleague; for, as the reader may have observed, these two officers were of separate factions in the army, and on indifferent terms with each other. Neither did the Acolyte consider his being united in commission with the Proto-spathaire, as a mark either of the Emperor's confidence, or of his own safety. He was, however, in the meantime, in the Blacquernal, where the

slaves of the interior made not the least hesitation, when ordered, to execute any officer of the court. The two generals had, therefore, no other alternative, than that which is allowed to two greyhounds who are reluctantly coupled together. The hope of Achilles Tatius was, that he might get safely through his mission to Tancréd, after which he thought the successful explosion of the conspiracy might take place and have its course, either as a matter desired and countenanced by those Latins, or passed over as a thing in which they took no interest on either side.

By the parting order of the Emperor, they were to mount on horseback at the sounding of the great Varangian trumpet, put themselves at the head of those Anglo-Saxon guards in the court-yard of their barrack, and await the Emperor's further orders.

There was something in this arrangement which pressed hard on the conscience of Achilles Tatius, yet he was at a loss to justify his apprehensions to himself, unless from a conscious feel-

ing of his own guilt. He felt, however, that in being detained, under pretence of an honourable mission, at the head of the Varangians, he was deprived of the liberty of disposing of himself, by which he had hoped to communicate with the Cæsar and Hereward, whom he reckoned upon as his active accomplices, not knowing that the first was at this moment a prisoner in the Blacquernal, where Alexius had arrested him in the apartments of the Empress, and that the second was the most important support of Comnenus during the whole of that eventful day.

When the gigantic trumpet of the Varangian guards sent forth its deep signal through the city, the Proto-spathaire hurried Achilles along with him to the rendezvous of the Varangians, and on the way said to him, in an easy and indifferent tone, "As the Emperor is in the field in person, you, his representative, or Follower, will of course transmit no orders to the body-guard, except such as shall receive their origin from himself, so that you will consider your authority as this day suspended."

“ I regret,” said Achilles, “ that there should have seemed any cause for such precautions; I had hoped my own truth and fidelity—but—I am obsequious to his Imperial pleasure in all things.”

“ Such are his orders,” said the other officer, “ and you know under what penalty obedience is enforced.”

“ If I did not,” said Achilles, “ the composition of this body of guards would remind me, since it comprehends not only great part of those Varangians, who are the immediate defenders of the Emperor’s throne, but those slaves of the interior, who are the executioners of his pleasure.”

To this the Proto-spathaire returned no answer, while the more closely the Acolyte looked upon the guard which attended, to the unusual number of nearly three thousand men, the more had he reason to believe that he might esteem himself fortunate, if, by the intervention of either the Cæsar, Agelastes, or Hereward, he could pass to the conspirators a signal to suspend the intended explosion, which seemed to be provided against by the Emperor with unusual cau-

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tion. He would have given the full dream of empire, with which he had been for a short time lulled asleep, to have seen but a glimpse of the azure plume of Nicephorus, the white mantle of the philosopher, or even a glimmer of Hereward's battle-axe. No such objects could be seen any where, and not a little was the faithless Follower displeased to see that whichever way he turned his eyes, those of the Proto-spathaire, but especially of the trusty domestic officers of the empire, seemed to follow and watch their occupation.

Amidst the numerous soldiers whom he saw on all sides, his eye did not recognise a single man with whom he could exchange a friendly or confidential glance, and he stood in all that agony of terror, which is rendered the more discomfiting, because the traitor is conscious that, beset by various foes, his own fears are the most likely of all to betray him. Internally, as the danger seemed to increase, and as his alarmed imagination attempted to discern new reasons for it, he could only conclude that either one of the three principal conspirators, or at least some

of the inferiors, had turned informers; and his doubt was, whether he should not screen his own share of what had been premeditated, by flinging himself at the feet of the Emperor, and making a full confession. But still the fear of being premature in having recourse to such a base means of saving himself, joined to the absence of the Emperor, united to keep within his lips a secret, which concerned not only all his future fortunes, but life itself. He was in the meantime, therefore, plunged as it were in a sea of trouble and uncertainty, while the specks of land, which seemed to promise him refuge, were distant, dimly seen, and extremely difficult of attainment.

CHAPTER VII.

To-morrow—oh, that's sudden! Spare him, spare him;
He's not prepared to die.

SHAKSPEARE.

At the moment when Achilles Tatius, with a feeling of much insecurity, awaited the unwinding of the perilous skein of state politics, a private council of the Imperial family was held in the hall termed the Temple of the Muses, repeatedly distinguished as the apartment in which the Princess Anna Comnena was wont to make her evening recitations to those who were permitted the honour of hearing prelections of her history. The council consisted of the Empress Irene, the Princess herself, and the Emperor, with the Patriarch of the Greek church as a sort of mediator between a course of severity and a dangerous degree of lenity.

“Tell not me, Irene,” said the Emperor, “of the fine things attached to the praise of mercy.

Here have I sacrificed my just revenge over my rival Ursel, and what good do I obtain by it? Why, the old obstinate man, instead of being tractable, and sensible of the generosity which has spared his life and eyes, can be with difficulty brought to exert himself in favour of the Prince to whom he owes them. I used to think that eyesight and the breath of life were things which one would preserve at any sacrifice; but, on the contrary, I now believe men value them like mere toys. Talk not to me, therefore, of the gratitude to be excited by saving this ungrateful cub; and believe me, girl," turning to Anna, "that not only will all my subjects, should I follow your advice, laugh at me for sparing a man so predetermined to work my ruin, but even thou thyself wilt be the first to upbraid me with the foolish kindness thou art now so anxious to extort from me."

"Your Imperial pleasure then," said the Patriarch, "is fixed that your unfortunate son-in-law shall suffer death for his accession to this conspiracy, deluded by that heathen villain Agelastes, and the traitorous Achilles Tatius?"

“Such is my purpose,” said the Emperor; “and in evidence that I mean not again to pass over a sentence of this kind with a seeming execution only, as in the case of Ursel, this ungrateful traitor of ours shall be led from the top of the staircase, or ladder of Acheron, as it is called, through the large chamber named the hall of judgment, at the upper end of which are arranged the apparatus for execution, by which I swear”——

“Swear not at all!” said the Patriarch; “I forbid thee, in the name of that Heaven whose voice (though unworthy) speaks in my person, to quench the smoking flax, or destroy the slight hope which there may remain, that you may finally be persuaded to alter your purpose respecting your misguided son-in-law, within the space allotted to him to sue for your mercy. Remember, I pray you, the remorse of Constantine.”

“What means your reverence?” said Irene.

“A trifle,” replied the Emperor, “not worthy being quoted from such a mouth as the Pa-

triarclia, being, as it probably is, a relic of paganism."

"What is it?" exclaimed the females anxiously, in the hope of hearing something which might strengthen their side of the argument, and something moved, perhaps, by curiosity, a motive which seldom slumbers in a female bosom, even when the stronger passions are in arms.

"The Patriarch will tell you," answered Alexius, "since you must needs know; though, I promise you, you will not receive any assistance in your argument from a silly legendary tale."

"Hear it, however," said the Patriarch; "for though it is a tale of the olden time, and sometimes supposed to refer to the period when heathenism predominated, it is no less true, that it was a vow made and registered in the chancery of the rightful Deity, by an Emperor of Greece.

"What I am now to relate to you," continued he, "is, in truth, a tale not only of a Christian Emperor, but of him who made the whole empire Christian; and of that very Constantine, who was also the first who declared Constantinople

to be the metropolis of the empire. This hero, remarkable alike for his zeal for religion and for his warlike achievements, was crowned by Heaven with repeated victory, and with all manner of blessings, save that unity in his family which wise men are most ambitious to possess. Not only was the blessing of concord among brethren denied to the family of this triumphant Emperor, but a deserving son of mature age, who had been supposed to aspire to share the throne with his father, was suddenly, and at midnight, called upon to enter his defence against a capital charge of treason. You will readily excuse my referring to the arts by which the son was rendered guilty in the eyes of the father. Be it enough to say, that the unfortunate young man fell a victim to the guilt of his stepmother, Fausta, and that he disdained to exculpate himself from a charge so gross and so erroneous. It is said, that the anger of the Emperor was kept up against his son by the sycophants who called upon Constantine to observe that the culprit disdained even to supplicate for mercy, or vindicate his innocence from so foul a charge.

“ But the death-blow had no sooner struck the innocent youth, than his father obtained proof of the rashness with which he had acted. He had at this period been engaged in constructing the subterranean parts of the Blacquernal palace, which his remorse appointed to contain a record of his paternal grief and remorse. At the upper part of the staircase, called the Pit of Acheron; he caused to be constructed a large chamber, still called the Hall of Judgment, for the purpose of execution. A passage through an archway in the upper wall leads from the hall to the place of misery, where the axe, or other engine, is disposed for the execution of state prisoners of consequence. Over this archway was placed a species of marble altar, surmounted by an image of the unfortunate Crispus—the materials were gold, and it bore the memorable inscription, TO MY SON, WHOM I RASHLY CONDEMNED, AND TOO HASTILY EXECUTED. When constructing this passage, Constantine made a vow, that he himself and his posterity, being reigning Emperors, would stand beside the statue of Crispus, at the time when any individual of their family

should be led to execution, and before they suffered him to pass from the Hall of Judgment to the Chamber of Death, that they should themselves be personally convinced of the truth of the charge under which he suffered.

“ Time rolled on—the memory of Constantine was remembered almost like that of a saint, and the respect paid to it threw into shadow the anecdote of his son’s death. The exigencies of the state rendered it difficult to keep so large a sum in specie invested in a statue, which called to mind the unpleasant failings of so great a man. Your Imperial Highness’s predecessors applied the metal which formed the statue to support the Turkish wars; and the remorse and penance of Constantine died away in an obscure tradition of the church or of the palace. Still, however, unless your Imperial Majesty has strong reasons to the contrary, I should give it as my opinion, that you will hardly achieve what is due to the memory of the greatest of your predecessors, unless you give this unfortunate criminal, being so near a relation of your own, an opportunity of pleading his cause before passing by

the altar of refuge; being the name which is customarily given to the monument of the unfortunate Crispus, son of Constantine, although now deprived both of the golden letters which composed the inscription, and the golden image which represented the royal sufferer."

A mournful piece of music was now heard to ascend the stair so often mentioned.

"If I must hear the Cæsar Nicephorus Briennius, ere he pass the altar of refuge, there must be no loss of time," said the Emperor; "for these melancholy sounds announce that he has already approached the Hall of Judgment."

Both the Imperial ladies began instantly, with the utmost earnestness, to deprecate the execution of the Cæsar's doom, and to conjure Alexius, as he hoped for quiet in his household, and the everlasting gratitude of his wife and daughter, that he would listen to their entreaties in behalf of an unfortunate man, who had been seduced into guilt, but not from his heart.

"I will at least see him," said the Emperor, "and the holy vow of Constantine shall be in the present instance strictly observed. But re-

member, you foolish women, that the state of Crispus and the present Cæsar, is as different as guilt from innocence, and that their fates, therefore, may be justly decided upon opposite principles, and with opposite results. But I will confront this criminal; and you, Patriarch, may be present to render what help is in your power to a dying man; for you, the wife and mother of the criminal, you will, methinks, do well to retire to the church, and pray God for the soul of the deceased, rather than disturb his last moments with unavailing lamentations."

"Alexius," said the Empress Irene, "I beseech you to be contented; be assured that we will not leave you in this dogged humour of blood-shedding, lest you make such materials for history as are fitter for the time of Nero than of Constantine."

The Emperor, without reply, led the way into the Hall of Judgment, where a much stronger light than usual was already shining up the stair of Acheron, from which were heard to sound, by sullen and intermitted fits, the penitential psalms which the Greek church has appointed to be

sung at executions. Twenty mute slaves, the pale colour of whose turbans gave a ghastly look to the withered cast of their features, and the glaring whiteness of their eyeballs, ascended two by two, as it were from the bowels of the earth, each of them bearing in one hand a naked sabre, and in the other a lighted torch. After these came the unfortunate Nicephorus; his looks were those of a man half-dead from the terror of immediate dissolution, and what he possessed of remaining attention, was turned alternately to two black-stoled monks, who were anxiously repeating religious passages to him alternately from the Greek scripture, and the form of devotion adopted by the court of Constantinople. The Cæsar's dress also corresponded to his mournful fortunes: His legs and arms were bare, and a simple white tunic, the neck of which was already open, showed that he had assumed the garments which were to serve his last turn. A tall muscular Nubian slave, who considered himself obviously as the principal person in the procession, bore on his shoulder a large heavy headsmen's axe, and, like a demon waiting on a sor-

even; stalked step for step after his victim. The rear of the procession was closed by a band of four priests, each of whom chanted from time to time the devotional psalm which was thundered forth on the occasion; and another of slaves, armed with bows and quivers, and with lances, to resist any attempt at rescue, if such should be effected.

It would have required a harder heart than that of the unlucky Princess to have resisted this gloomy apparatus of fear and sorrow, surrounding, at the same time directed against, a beloved object, the lover of her youth, and the husband of her bosom, within a few minutes of the termination of his mortal career.

As the mournful train approached towards the altar of refuge, half-encircled as it now was by the two great and expanded arms which projected from the wall, the Emperor, who stood directly in the passage, threw upon the flame of the altar some chips of aromatic wood, steeped in spirit of wine, which, leaping at once into a blaze, illuminated the doleful procession, the figure of the principal culprit, and the slaves, who

had most of them extinguished their flambeaux so soon as they had served the purpose of lighting them up the staircase.

The sudden light spread from the altar failed not to make the Emperor and the Princesses visible to the mournful group which approached through the hall. All halted—all were silent. It was a meeting, as the Princess has expressed herself in her historical work, such as took place betwixt Ulysses and the inhabitants of the other world, who, when they tasted of the blood of his sacrifices, recognised him indeed, but with empty lamentations, and gestures feeble and shadowy. The hymn of contrition sunk also into silence; and, of the whole group, the only figure rendered more distinct, was the gigantic executioner, whose high and furrowed forehead, as well as the broad steel of his axe, caught and reflected back the bright gleam from the altar. Alexius saw the necessity of breaking the silence which ensued, lest it should give the intercessors for the prisoner an opportunity of renewing their entreaties.

“*Nicephorus Briennius,*” he said, with a voice

which, although generally interrupted by a slight hesitation, which procured him, among his enemies, the nickname of the Stutterer, yet, upon important occasions like the present, was so judiciously tuned and balanced in its sentences, that no such defect was at all visible—"Nicephorus Briennius," he said, "late Cæsar, the lawful doom hath been spoken, that, having conspired against the life of thy rightful sovereign and affectionate father, Alexius Comnenus, thou shalt suffer the appropriate sentence, by having thy head struck from thy body. Here, therefore, at the last altar of refuge, I meet thee, according to the vow of the immortal Constantine, for the purpose of demanding whether thou hast any thing to allege why this doom should not be executed? Even at this eleventh hour, thy tongue is unloosed to speak with freedom what may concern thy life. All is prepared in this world and in the next. Look forward beyond yon archway—the block is fixed. Look behind thee, thou see'st the axe already sharpened—thy place for good or evil in the next world is already determined—time flies—eternity approaches. If

thou hast aught to say, speak it freely—if nought, confess the justice of thy sentence, and pass on to death.”

The Emperor commenced this oration with those looks described by his daughter as so piercing, that they dazzled like lightning, and his periods, if not precisely flowing like burning lava, were yet the accents of a man having the power of absolute command, and as such produced an effect not only on the criminal, but also upon the Prince himself, whose watery eyes and faltering voice acknowledged his sense and feeling of the fatal import of the present moment.

Rousing himself to the conclusion of what he had commenced, the Emperor again demanded whether the prisoner had any thing to say in his own defence.

Nicephorus was not one of those hardened criminals who may be termed the very prodigies of history, from the coolness with which they contemplated the consummation of their crimes, whether in their own punishment, or the misfortunes of others. “I have been tempted,” he said, dropping on his knees, “and I have fallen. I

have nothing to allege in excuse of my folly and ingratitude; but I stand prepared to die to expiate my guilt." A deep sigh, almost amounting to a scream, was here heard, close behind the Emperor, and its cause assigned by the sudden exclamation of Irene,—“ My lord! my lord! your daughter is gone!” And in fact Anna Comnena had sunk into her mother’s arms without either sense or motion. The father’s attention was instantly called to support his swooning child, while the unhappy husband strove with the guards to be permitted to go to the assistance of his wife. “ Give me but five minutes of that time which the law has abridged—let my efforts but assist in recalling her to a life which should be as long as her virtues and her talents deserve; and then let me die at her feet, for I care not to go an inch beyond.”

The Emperor, who in fact had been more astonished at the boldness and rashness of Nicephorus, than alarmed by his power, considered him as a man rather misled than misleading others, and felt, therefore, the full effect of this last interview. He was, besides, not naturally cruel,

where severities were to be enforced under his own eye.

“The divine and immortal Constantine,” he said, “did not, I am persuaded, subject his descendants to this severe trial, in order further to search out the innocence of the criminals, but rather to give to those who came after him an opportunity of generously forgiving a crime which could not, without pardon, the express pardon of the Prince, escape without punishment. I rejoice that I am born of the willow rather than of the oak, and I acknowledge my weakness, that not even the safety of my own life, or resentment of this unhappy man’s treasonable machinations, have the same effect with me as the tears of my wife and the swooning of my daughter. Rise up, Nicephorus Briennius, freely pardoned, and restored even to the rank of Cæsar. We will direct thy pardon to be made out by the great Logothete, and sealed with the golden bull. For four-and-twenty hours thou art a prisoner, until an arrangement is made for preserving the public peace. Meanwhile, thou wilt remain under the charge of the Patriarch, who will be answer-

able for thy forthcoming.—Daughter and wife, you must now go hence to your own apartment; a future time will come, during which you may have enough of weeping and embracing, mourning and rejoicing. Pray Heaven that I, who, having been trained on till I have sacrificed justice and true policy to uxorious compassion and paternal tenderness of heart, may not have cause at last for grieving in good earnest for all the events of this miscellaneous drama.”

The pardoned Cæsar, who endeavoured to regulate his ideas according to this unexpected change, found it as difficult to reconcile himself to the reality of his situation as Ursel to the face of nature, after having been long deprived of enjoying it; so much do the dizziness and confusion of ideas, occasioned by moral and physical causes of surprise and terror, resemble each other in their effects on the understanding.

At length he stammered forth a request that he might be permitted to go forth to the field with the Emperor, and divert, by the interposition of his own body, the traitorous blows which

some desperate man might aim against that of the Emperor, in a day which was too likely to be one of danger and bloodshed.

“ Hold there !” said Alexius Comnenus ;—
“ we will not begin thy newly-redeemed life by renewed doubts of thine allegiance ; yet it is but fitting to remind thee, that thou art still the nominal and ostensible head of those who expect to take a part in this day’s insurrection ; and it will be the safest course to trust its pacification to others than to thee. Go, sir, compare notes with the Patriarch, and merit your pardon by confessing to him any traitorous intentions concerning this foul conspiracy with which we may be as yet unacquainted.— Daughter and wife, farewell ! I must now depart for the lists, where I have to speak with the traitor Achilles Tatius and the heathenish infidel Agelastes, if he still lives, but of whose providential death I hear a confirmed rumour.”

“ Yet do not go, my dearest father !” said the Princess ; “ but let me rather go to encourage the loyal subjects in your behalf. The extreme kindness which you have extended towards my

guilty husband, convinces me of the extent of your affection towards your unworthy daughter, and the greatness of the sacrifice which you have made to her almost childish affection for an ungrateful man, who put your life in danger."

"That is to say, daughter," said the Emperor, smiling, "that the pardon of your husband is a boon which has lost its merit when it is granted? Take my advice, Anna, and think otherwise; wives and their husbands ought in prudence to forget their offences towards each other as soon as human nature will permit them. Life is too short, and conjugal tranquillity too uncertain, to admit of dwelling long upon such irritating subjects. To your apartments, Princesses, and prepare the scarlet buskins, and the embroidery which is displayed on the cuffs and collars of the Cæsar's robe, indicative of his high rank. He must not be seen without them on the morrow.—Reverend father, I remind you once more that the Cæsar is in your personal custody from this moment until to-morrow at the same hour." They parted; the Emperor repairing to put himself at the head of his Varangian guards—

the Cæsar, under the superintendence of the Patriarch, withdrawing into the interior of the Blacquernal Palace, where Nicephorus Briennius was under the necessity of "unthreading the rude eye of rebellion," and throwing such lights as were in his power upon the progress of the conspiracy.

“Agelastes,” he said, “Achilles Tatius, and Hereward the Varangian, were the persons principally intrusted in its progress. But whether they had been all true to their engagements, he did not pretend to be assured.”

In the female apartments, there was a violent discussion betwixt Anna Comnena and her mother. The Princess had undergone during the day many changes of sentiment and feeling; and though they had finally united themselves into one strong interest in her husband's favour, yet no sooner was the fear of his punishment removed, than the sense of his ungrateful behaviour began to revive. She became sensible also that a woman of her extraordinary attainments, who had been by an universal course of flattery disposed to entertain an extraordinary opinion of

her own consequence, made rather a poor figure when she had been the passive subject of a long series of intrigues, by which she was destined to be disposed of in one way or the other, according to the humour of a set of subordinate conspirators, who never so much as dreamed of regarding her as a being capable of forming a wish in her own behalf, or even yielding or refusing a consent. Her father's authority over her, and right to dispose of her, was less questionable; but even then it was something derogatory to the dignity of a Princess born in the purple—an authoress besides, and giver of immortality—to be, without her own consent, thrown, as it were, at the head now of one suitor, now of another, however mean or disgusting, whose alliance could for the time benefit the Emperor. The consequence of these moody reflections was, that Anna Comnena deeply toiled in spirit for the discovery of some means by which she might assert her sullied dignity, and various were the expedients which she revolved.

CHAPTER VIII.

But now the hand of fate is on the curtain,
And brings the scene to light.

Don Sebastian.

THE gigantic trumpet of the Varangians sounded its loudest note of march, and the squadrons of the faithful guards, sheathed in complete mail, and inclosing in their centre the person of their Imperial master, set forth upon their procession through the streets of Constantinople. The form of Alexius, glittering in his splendid armour, seemed no unmeet central point for the force of an empire; and while the citizens crowded in the train of him and his escort, there might be seen a visible difference between those who came with the premeditated intention of tumult, and the greater part, who, like the multitude of every great city, thrust each other, and

shout for rapture on account of any cause for which a crowd may be collected together. The hope of the conspirators was lodged chiefly in the Immortal Guards, who were levied principally for the defence of Constantinople, partook of the general prejudices of the citizens, and had been particularly influenced by those in favour of Ursel, by whom, previous to his imprisonment, they had themselves been commanded. The conspirators had determined that those of this body who were considered as most discontented, should early in the morning take possession of the posts in the lists most favourable for their purpose of assaulting the Emperor's person. But, in spite of all efforts short of actual violence, for which the time did not seem to be come, they found themselves disappointed in this purpose, by parties of the Varangian guards, planted with apparent carelessness, but, in fact, with perfect skill, for the prevention of their enterprise. Somewhat confounded at perceiving that a design, which they could not suppose to be suspected, was, nevertheless, on every part controlled and counter-checked, the

conspirators began to look for the principal persons of their own party, on whom they depended for orders in this emergency; but neither the Cæsar nor Agelastes were to be seen, whether in the lists or on the military march from Constantinople; and though Achilles Tatius rode in the latter assembly, yet it might be clearly observed that he was rather attending upon the Proto-spathaire, than assuming that independence as an officer which he loved to affect.

In this manner, as the Emperor with his glittering bands approached the phalanx of Tancred and his followers, who were drawn up, it will be remembered, upon a rising cape between the city and the lists, the main body of the Imperial procession deflected in some degree from the straight road, in order to march past them without interruption; while the Proto-spathaire and the Acolyte passed under the escort of a band of Varangians, to bear the Emperor's enquiries to Prince Tancred, concerning the purpose of his being there with his band. The short march was soon performed—the large trumpet which attended the two officers sounded a parley, and

Tancred himself, remarkable for that personal beauty which Tasso has preferred to any of the crusaders, except Rinaldo d'Este, the creature of his own poetical imagination, advanced to parley with them.

“ The Emperor of Greece,” said the Protospathaire, to Tancred, “ requires the Prince of Otranto to show, by the two high officers who shall deliver him this message, with what purpose he has returned, contrary to his oath, to the right side of these straits ; assuring Prince Tancred, at the same time, that nothing will so much please the Emperor, as to receive an answer not at variance with his treaty with the Duke of Bouillon, and the oath which was taken by the crusading nobles and their soldiers ; since that would enable the Emperor, in conformity to his own wishes, by his kind reception of Prince Tancred and his troop, to show how high is his estimation of the dignity of the one, and the bravery of both.—We wait an answer.”

The tone of the message had nothing in it very alarming, and its substance cost Prince Tancred very little trouble to answer. “ The

cause," he said, "of the Prince of Otranto appearing here with fifty lances, is this cartel, in which a combat is appointed betwixt Nicephorus Briennius, called the Cæsar, a high member of this empire, and a worthy knight of great fame, the partner of the Pilgrims who have taken the Cross, in their high vow to rescue Palestine from the infidels. The name of the said Knight is the redoubted Robert of Paris. It becomes, therefore, an obligation indispensable upon the Holy Pilgrims of the Crusade, to send one chief of their number, with a body of men-at-arms, sufficient to see, as is usual, fair play between the combatants. That such is their intention, may be seen from their sending no more than fifty lances, with their furniture and following; whereas it would have cost them no trouble to have detached ten times the number, had they nourished any purpose of interfering by force, or disturbing the fair combat which is about to take place. The Prince of Otranto, therefore, and his followers, will place themselves at the disposal of the Imperial Court, and witness the proceedings of the combat, with the most perfect

confidence that the rules of fair battle will be punctually observed."

The two Grecian officers transmitted this reply to the Emperor, who heard it with pleasure; and, immediately proceeding to act upon the principle which he had laid down, of maintaining peace, if possible, with the crusaders, named Prince Tancred with the Proto-spathaire as Field Marshals of the lists, fully empowered, under the Emperor, to decide all the terms of the combat, and to have recourse to Alexis himself where their opinions disagreed. This was made known to the assistants, who were thus prepared for the entry into the lists of the Grecian officer and the Italian Prince in full armour, while a solemn proclamation announced to all the spectators their solemn office. The same annunciation commanded the assistants of every kind to clear a convenient part of the seats which surrounded the lists on one side, that it might serve for the accommodation of Prince Tancred's followers.

Achilles Tatiüs, who was a heedful observer of all these passages, saw with alarm, that by the

last collocation the armed Latins were interposed between the Immortal Guards and the discontented citizens, which made it most probable that the conspiracy was discovered, and that Alexius found he had a good right to reckon upon the assistance of Tancred and his forces in the task of suppressing it. This, added to the cold and caustic manner in which the Emperor communicated his commands to him, made the Acolyte of opinion, that his best chance of escape from the danger in which he was now placed, was, that the whole conspiracy should fall to the ground, and that the day should pass without the least attempt to shake the throne of Alexius Comnenus. Even then it continued highly doubtful, whether a despot, so wily and so suspicious as the Emperor, would think it sufficient to rest satisfied with the private knowledge of the undertaking, and its failure, with which he appeared to be possessed, without putting into exercise the bow-strings and the blinding-irons of the mutes of the interior. There was, however, little possibility either of flight or of resistance. The least attempt to withdraw himself from the

neighbourhood of those faithful followers of the Emperor, personal foes of his own, by whom he was gradually and more closely surrounded, became each moment more perilous, and more certain to provoke a rupture which it was the interest of the weaker party to delay, with whatever difficulty. And while the soldiers under Achilles's immediate authority seemed still to treat him as their superior officer, and appeal to him for the word of command, it seemed to become more and more evident that the slightest degree of suspicion which should be excited, would be the instant signal for his being placed under arrest. With a trembling heart, therefore, and eyes dimmed by the powerful idea of soon parting with the light of day, and all that it made visible, the Acolyte saw himself condemned to watch the turn of circumstances, over which he could have no influence, and to content himself with waiting the result of a drama, in which his own life was concerned, although the piece was played by others. Indeed, it seemed as if through the whole assembly some signal

was waited for, which no one was in readiness to give.

The discontented citizens and soldiers looked in vain for Agelastes and the Cæsar ; and when they observed the condition of Achilles Tatius, it seemed such as rather to express doubt and consternation, than to give encouragement to the hopes they had entertained. Many of the lower classes, however, felt too secure in their own insignificance, to fear the personal consequences of a tumult, and were desirous, therefore, to provoke the disturbance, which seemed hushing itself to sleep.

A hoarse murmur, which attained almost the importance of a shout, exclaimed,—“ Justice, justice !—Ursel, Ursel !—The rights of the Immortal Guards !” &c. At this the trumpet of the Varangians awoke, and its tremendous tones were heard to peal loudly over the whole assembly, as the voice of its presiding deity. A dead silence prevailed in the multitude, and the voice of a herald announced, in the name of Alexius Comnenus, his sovereign will and pleasure.

“ Citizens of the Roman empire, your com-

plaints, stirred up by factious men, have reached the ear of your Emperor; you shall yourselves be witness to his power of gratifying his people. At your request, and before your own sight, the visual ray which hath been quenched shall be re-illuminated—the mind whose efforts were restricted to the imperfect supply of individual wants, shall be again extended, if such is the owner's will, to the charge of an ample Theme or division of the empire. Political jealousy, more hard to receive conviction than the blind to receive sight, shall yield itself conquered, by the Emperor's paternal love of his people, and his desire to give them satisfaction. Ursel, the darling of your wishes, supposed to be long dead, or at least believed to exist in blinded seclusion, is restored to you well in health, clear in eyesight, and possessed of every faculty necessary to adorn the Emperor's favour, or merit the affection of the people."

As the herald thus spoke, a figure, which had hitherto stood shrouded behind some officers of the interior, now stepped forth, and flinging from him a dusky veil, in which he was wrapt,

appeared in a dazzling scarlet garment, of which the sleeves and buskins displayed those ornaments which expressed a rank nearly adjacent to that of the Emperor himself. He held in his hand a silver truncheon, the badge of delegated command over the Immortal Guards, and, kneeling before the Emperor, presented it to his hands, intimating a virtual resignation of the command which it implied. The whole assembly were electrified at the appearance of a person long supposed either dead, or by cruel means rendered incapable of public trust. Some recognised the man, whose appearance and features were not easily forgot, and gratulated him upon his most unexpected return to the service of his country. Others stood suspended in amazement, not knowing whether to trust their eyes, while a few determined malecontents eagerly pressed upon the assembly an allegation that the person presented as Ursel was only a counterfeit, and the whole a trick of the Emperor.

“Speak to them, noble Ursel,” said the Emperor. “Tell them, that if I have sinned against thee, it has been because I was deceived, and

that my disposition to make thee amends is as ample as ever was my purpose of doing thee wrong."

" Friends and countrymen," said Ursel, turning himself to the assembly, " his Imperial Majesty permits me to offer my assurance, that if in any former part of my life I have suffered at his hand, it is more than wiped out by the feelings of a moment so glorious as this ; and that I am well satisfied, from the present instant, to spend what remains of my life in the service of the most generous and beneficent of sovereigns, or, with his permission, to bestow it in preparing, by devotional exercises, for an infinite immortality to be spent in the society of saints and angels. Whichever choice I shall make, I reckon that you, my beloved countrymen, who have remembered me so kindly during years of darkness and captivity, will not fail to afford me the advantage of your prayers."

This sudden apparition of the long-lost Ursel had too much of that which elevates and surprises not to captivate the multitude, and they sealed their reconciliation with three tremen-

dous shouts, which are said so to have shaken the air, that birds, incapable of sustaining themselves, sunk down exhausted out of their native element.

CHAPTER IX.

“What, leave the combat out!” exclaimed the knight.
“Yea! or we must renounce the Stagyrite.”
“So large a crowd the stage will ne’er contain.”
—“Then build a new, or act it on a plain.”

POPE.

THE sounds of the gratulating shout had expanded over the distant shores of the Bosphorus by mountain and forest, and died at length in the farthest echoes, when the people, in the silence which ensued, appeared to ask each other what next scene was about to adorn a pause so solemn and a stage so august. The pause would probably have soon given place to some new clamour, for a multitude, from whatever cause assembled, seldom remains long silent, had not a new signal from the Varangian trumpet given notice of a fresh purpose to solicit their attention. The

blast had something in its tone spirit-stirring and yet melancholy, partaking both of the character of a point of war, and of the doleful sounds which might be chosen to announce an execution of peculiar solemnity. Its notes were high and widely extended, and prolonged and long dwelt upon, as if the brazen clamour had been waked by something more tremendous than the lungs of mere mortals.

The multitude appeared to acknowledge these awful sounds, which were indeed such as habitually solicited their attention to Imperial edicts of melancholy import, by which rebellions were announced, dooms of treason discharged, and other tidings of a great and affecting import intimated to the people of Constantinople. When the trumpet had in its turn ceased, with its thrilling and doleful notes, to agitate the immense assembly, the voice of the herald again addressed them.

It announced in a grave and affecting strain, that it sometimes chanced how the people failed in their duty to a sovereign, who was unto them as a father, and how it became the painful duty

of the prince to use the rod of correction rather than the olive sceptre of mercy.

“Fortunate,” continued the herald, “it is, when the supreme Deity, having taken on himself the preservation of a throne, in beneficence and justice resembling his own, has also assumed the most painful task of his earthly delegate, by punishing those whom his unerring judgment acknowledges as most guilty, and leaving to his substitute the more agreeable task of pardoning such of those as art has misled, and treachery hath involved in its snares.

“Such being the case, Greece and its accompanying Themes, are called upon to listen and learn that a villain, named Agelastes, who had insinuated himself into the favour of the Emperor, by affectation of deep knowledge and severe virtue, had formed a treacherous plan for the murder of the Emperor Alexius Comnenus, and a revolution in the state. This person, who, under pretended wisdom, hid the doctrines of a heretic and the vices of a sensualist, had found proselytes to his doctrines even among the Emperor’s household, and those persons who were

most bound to him, and down to the lower order, to excite the last of whom were dispersed a multitude of forged rumours, similar to those concerning Ursel's death and blindness, of which your own eyes have witnessed the falsehood."

The people, who had hitherto listened in silence, upon this appeal broke forth in a clamorous assent. They had scarcely been again silent, ere the iron-voiced herald continued his proclamation.

"Not Korah, Dathan, and Abiram," he said, "had more justly, or more directly, fallen under the doom of an offended Deity, than this villain, Agelastes. The steadfast earth gaped to devour the apostate sons of Israel, but the termination of this wretched man's existence has been, as far as can now be known, by the direct means of an evil spirit, whom his own arts had evoked into the upper air. By this spirit, as would appear by the testimony of a noble lady, and other females, who witnessed the termination of his life, Agelastes was strangled, a fate well becoming his odious crimes. Such a death, even of a guilty man, must, indeed, be most painful to the

humane feelings of the Emperor, because it involves suffering beyond this world. But the awful catastrophe carries with it this comfort, that it absolves the Emperor from the necessity of carrying any farther a vengeance which Heaven itself seems to have limited to the exemplary punishment of the principal conspirator. Some changes of offices and situations shall be made, for the sake of safety and good order; but the secret, who had, or who had not, been concerned in this awful crime, shall sleep in the bosoms of the persons themselves implicated, since the Emperor is determined to dismiss their offence from his memory, as the effect of a transient delusion. Let all, therefore, who now hear me, whatever consciousness they may possess of a knowledge of what was this day intended, return to their houses, assured that their own thoughts will be their only punishment. Let them rejoice that Almighty goodness has saved them from the meditations of their own hearts, and, according to the affecting language of Scripture, —“ Let them repent and sin no more, lest a worse thing befall them.”

The voice of the herald then ceased, and was again answered by the shouts of the audience. These were unanimous; for circumstances contributed to convince the malecontent party that they stood at the Sovereign's mercy, and the edict that they heard having shown his acquaintance with their guilt, it lay at his pleasure to let loose upon them the strength of the Varangians; while, from the terms on which it had pleased him to receive Tancred, it was probable that the Apuleian forces were also at his disposal.

The voices, therefore, of the bulky Stephanos, of Harpax the centurion, and other rebels, both of the camp and city, were the first to thunder forth their gratitude for the clemency of the Emperor, and their thanks to Heaven for his preservation.

The audience, reconciled to the thoughts of the discovered and frustrated conspiracy, began meantime, according to their custom, to turn themselves to the consideration of the matter which had more avowedly called them together, and private whispers, swelling by degrees into

murmurs, began to express the dissatisfaction of the citizens at being thus long assembled, without receiving any communication respecting the announced purpose of their meeting.

Alexius was not slow to perceive the tendency of their thoughts; and, on a signal from his hand, the trumpets blew a point of war, in sounds far more lively than those which had prefaced the Imperial edict. "Robert, Count of Paris," then said a herald, "art thou here in thy place, or by knightly proxy, to answer the challenge brought against thee by his Imperial Highness Nicephorus Briennius, Cæsar of this empire?"

The Emperor conceived himself to have equally provided against the actual appearance at this call of either of the parties named, and had prepared an exhibition of another kind, namely, certain cages, tenanted by wild animals, which being now loosened, should do their pleasure with each other in the eyes of the assembly. His astonishment and confusion, therefore, were great, when, as the last note of the proclamation died in the echo, Count Robert of Paris stood forth,

armed cap-a-pie, his mailed charger led behind him from within the curtained enclosure, at one end of the lists, as if ready to mount at the signal of the marshal.

The alarm and the shame that were visible in every countenance near the Imperial presence, when no Cæsar came forth in like fashion to confront the formidable Frank, were not of long duration. Hardly had the style and title of the Count of Paris been duly announced by the heralds, and their second summons of his antagonist uttered in due form, when a person, dressed like one of the Varangian Guards, sprung into the lists, and announced himself as ready to do battle in the name and place of the Cæsar Nicephorus Briennius, and for the honour of the empire.

Alexius, with the utmost joy, beheld this unexpected assistance, and readily gave his consent to the bold soldier who stood thus forward in the hour of utmost need, to take upon himself the dangerous office of champion. He the more readily acquiesced, as, from the size and appearance of the soldier, and the gallant bearing he

displayed, he had no doubt of his individual person, and fully confided in his valour. But Prince Tancred interposed his opposition.

“The lists,” he said, “were only open to knights and nobles; or, at any rate, men were not permitted to meet therein who were not of some equality of birth and blood; nor could he remain a silent witness where the laws of chivalry were in such respects forgotten.”

“Let Count Robert of Paris,” said the Varangian, “look upon my countenance, and say whether he has not, by promise, removed all objection to our contest which might be founded upon an inequality of condition, and let him be judge himself, whether, by meeting me in this field, he will do more than comply with a compact which he has long since become bound by.”

Count Robert, upon this appeal, advanced, and acknowledged, without further debate, that, notwithstanding their difference of rank, he held himself bound by his solemn word to give this valiant soldier a meeting in the field. That he regretted, on account of this gallant man's emi-

ment virtues, and the high services he had received at his hands, that they should now stand upon terms of such bloody arbitration; but since nothing was more common, than that the fate of war called on friends to meet each other in mortal combat, he would not shrink from the engagement he had pledged himself to; nor did he think his quality in the slightest degree infringed or diminished, by meeting in battle a warrior so well known and of such good account as Hereward, the brave Varangian. He added, that "he willingly admitted that the combat should take place on foot, and with the battle-axe, which was the ordinary weapon of the Varangian guard."

Hereward had stood still, almost like a statue, while this discourse passed; but when the Count of Paris had made this speech, he inclined himself towards him with a graceful obeisance, and expressed himself honoured and gratified by the manly manner in which the Count acquitted himself, according to his promise, with complete honour and fidelity.

"What we are to do," said Count Robert,

with a sigh of regret, which even his love of battle could not prevent, "let us do quickly; the heart may be affected, but the hand must do its duty."

Hereward assented, with the additional remark, "Let us then lose no more time, which is already flying fast." And, grasping his axe, he stood prepared for combat.

"I also am ready," said Count Robert of Paris, taking the same weapon from a Varangian soldier, who stood by the lists. Both were immediately upon the alert, nor did farther forms or circumstances put off the intended combat.

The first blows were given and parried with great caution, and Prince Tancred and others thought, that on the part of Count Robert the caution was much greater than usual; but, in combat as in food, the appetite increases with the exercise. The fiercer passions began, as usual, to awaken with the clash of arms and the sense of deadly blows, some of which were made with great fury on either side, and parried with considerable difficulty, and not so completely but what blood flowed on both their parts. The

Greeks looked with astonishment on a single combat, such as they had seldom witnessed, and held their breath as they beheld the furious blows dealt by either warrior, and expected with each stroke the annihilation of one or other of the combatants. As yet their strength and agility seemed somewhat equally matched, although those who judged with more pretension to knowledge, were of opinion, that Count Robert spared putting forth some part of the military skill for which he was celebrated; and the remark was generally made and allowed, that he had surrendered a great advantage by not insisting upon his right to fight upon horseback. On the other hand, it was the general opinion that the gallant Varangian omitted to take advantage of one or two opportunities afforded him by the heat of Count Robert's temper, who obviously was incensed at the duration of the combat.

Accident at length seemed about to decide what had been hitherto an equal combat. Count Robert, making a feint on one side of his antagonist, struck him on the other, which was uncovered, with the edge of his weapon, so that

the Varangian reeled, and seemed in the act of falling to the earth. The usual sound made by spectators at the sight of any painful or unpleasant circumstance, by drawing the breath between the teeth, was suddenly heard to pass through the assembly, while a female voice loud and eagerly exclaimed,—“Count Robert of Paris!—forget not this day that thou owest a life to Heaven and me.” The Count was in the act of again seconding his blow, with what effect could hardly be judged, when this cry reached his ears, and apparently took away his disposition for farther combat.

“I acknowledge the debt,” he said, sinking his battle-axe, and retreating two steps from his antagonist, who stood in astonishment, scarcely recovered from the stunning effect of the blow by which he was so nearly prostrated. He sunk the blade of his battle-axe in imitation of his antagonist, and seemed to wait in suspense what was to be the next process of the combat. “I acknowledge my debt,” said the valiant Count of Paris, “alike to Bertha of Britain and to the Almighty, who has preserved me from the crime

of ungrateful blood-guiltiness.—You have seen the fight, gentlemen,” turning to Tancred and his chivalry, “and can testify, on your honour, that it has been maintained fairly on both sides, and without advantage on either. I presume my honourable antagonist has by this time satisfied the desire which brought me under his challenge, and which certainly had no taste in it of personal or private quarrel. On my part, I retain towards him such a sense of personal obligation as would render my continuing this combat, unless compelled to it by self-defence, a shameful and sinful action.”

Alexius gladly embraced the terms of truce, which he was far from expecting, and threw down his warder, in signal that the duel was ended. Tancred, though somewhat surprised, and perhaps even scandalized, that a private soldier of the Emperor’s guard should have so long resisted the utmost efforts of so approved a knight, could not but own that the combat had been fought with perfect fairness and equality, and decided upon terms dishonourable to neither party. The Count’s character being well known

and established amongst the crusaders, they were compelled to believe that some motive of a most potent nature formed the principle upon which, very contrary to his general practice, he had proposed a cessation of the combat before it was brought to a deadly, or at least to a decisive conclusion. The edict of the Emperor upon the occasion, therefore, passed into a law, acknowledged by the assent of the chiefs present, and especially affirmed and gratulated by the shouts of the assembled spectators.

But perhaps the most interesting figure in the assembly was that of the bold Varangian, arrived so suddenly at a promotion of military renown, which the extreme difficulty he had experienced in keeping his ground against Count Robert had prevented him from anticipating, although his modesty had not diminished the indomitable courage with which he maintained the contest. He stood in the middle of the lists, his face ruddy with the exertion of the combat, and not less so from the modest consciousness proper to the plainness and simplicity of his character, which

was disconcerted by finding himself the central point of the gaze of the multitude.

“ Speak to me, my soldier,” said Alexius, strongly affected by the gratitude which he felt was due to Hereward upon so singular an occasion, “ speak to thine Emperor as his superior, for such thou art at this moment, and tell him if there is any manner, even at the expense of half his kingdom, to atone for his own life saved, and, what is yet dearer, for the honour of his country, which thou hast so manfully defended and preserved.”

“ My Lord,” answered Hereward, “ your Imperial Highness values my poor services over highly, and ought to attribute them to the noble Count of Paris, first, for his condescending to accept of an antagonist so mean in quality as myself; and next, in generously relinquishing victory when he might have achieved it by an additional blow; for I here confess before your Majesty, my brethren, and the assembled Grecians, that my power of protracting the combat was ended, when the gallant Count, by his generosity, put a stop to it.”

“Do not thyself that wrong, brave man,” said Count Robert; “for I vow to our Lady of the Broken Lances, that the combat was yet within the undetermined doom of Providence, when the pressure of my own feelings rendered me incapable of continuing it, to the necessary harm, perhaps to the mortal damage, of an antagonist to whom I owe so much kindness. Choose, therefore, the recompense which the generosity of thy Emperor offers in a manner so just and grateful, and fear not lest mortal voice pronounces that reward unmerited which Robert of Paris shall avouch with his sword to have been gallantly won upon his own crest.”

“You are too great, my lord, and too noble,” answered the Anglo-Saxon, “to be gainsaid by such as I am, and I must not awaken new strife between us by contesting the circumstances under which our combat so suddenly closed, nor would it be wise or prudent in me further to contradict you. My noble Emperor generously offers me the right of naming what he calls my recompense; but let not his generosity be dispraised, although it is from you, my lord, and

not from his Imperial Highness, that I am to ask a boon, to me the dearest to which my voice can give utterance."

"And that," said the Count, "has reference to Bertha, the faithful attendant of my wife?"

"Even so," said Hereward; "it is my proposal to request my discharge from the Varangian guard, and permission to share in your lordship's pious and honourable vow for the recovery of Palestine, with liberty to fight under your honoured banner, and permission from time to time to recommend my love-suit to Bertha, the attendant of the Countess of Paris, and the hope that it may find favour in the eyes of her noble lord and lady. I may thus finally hope to be restored to a country, which I have never ceased to love over the rest of the world."

"Thy service, noble soldier," said the Count, "shall be as acceptable to me as that of a born earl; nor is there an opportunity of acquiring honour which I can shape for thee, to which, as it occurs, I will not gladly prefer thee. I will not boast of what interest I have with the King of England, but something I can do with him,

and it shall be strained to the uttermost to settle thee in thine own beloved native country."

The Emperor then spoke. "Bear witness, heaven and earth, and you my faithful subjects, and you my gallant allies; above all, you my bold and true Varangian Guard, that we would rather have lost the brightest jewel from our Imperial crown, than have relinquished the service of this true and faithful Anglo-Saxon. But since go he must and will, it shall be my study to distinguish him by such marks of beneficence as may make it known through his future life, that he is the person to whom the Emperor Alexius Comnenus acknowledged a debt larger than his empire could discharge. You, my Lord Tancred, and your principal leaders, will sup
ith us this evening, and to-morrow resume your honourable and religious purpose of pilgrimage! We trust both the combatants will also oblige us by their presence.—Trumpets, give the signal for dismissal."

The trumpets sounded accordingly, and the different classes of spectators, armed and unarmed, broke up into various parties, or formed

into their military ranks, for the purpose of their return to the city.

The screams of women, suddenly and strangely raised, was the first thing that arrested the departure of the multitude, when those who glanced their eyes back, saw Sylvan, the great ouran-outang, produce himself in the lists, to their surprise and astonishment. The women, and many of the men who were present, unaccustomed to the ghastly look and savage appearance of a creature so extraordinary, raised a yell of terror so loud, that it discomposed the animal who was the occasion of its being raised. Sylvan, in the course of the night, having escaped over the garden-wall of Agelastes, and clambered over the rampart of the city, found no difficulty in hiding himself in the lists which were in the act of being raised, having found a lurking-place in some dark corner under the seats of the spectators. From this he was probably dislodged by the tumult of the dispersing multitude, and had been compelled, therefore, to make an appearance in public when he least desired it, not unlike that of the celebrated Puliccinello, at the

conclusion of his own drama, when he enters in mortal strife with the foul fiend himself, a scene which scarcely excites more terror among the juvenile audience, than did the unexpected apparition of Sylvan among the spectators of the duel. Bows were bent and javelins pointed by the braver part of the soldiery, against an animal of an appearance so ambiguous, and whom his uncommon size and grizzly look caused most who beheld him to suppose either the devil himself, or the apparition of some fiendish deity of ancient days, whom the heathens worshipped. Sylvan had so far improved such opportunities as had been afforded him, as to become sufficiently aware that the attitudes assumed by so many military men, inferred immediate danger to his person, from which he hastened to shelter himself by flying to the protection of Hereward, with whom he had been in some degree familiarized. He seized him, accordingly, by the cloak, and, by the absurd and alarmed look of his fantastic features, and a certain wild and gibbering chatter, endeavoured to express his fear and to ask protection. Hereward understood the

terrified creature, and turning to the Emperor's throne, said aloud,—“ Poor frightened being, turn thy petition, and gestures, and tones, to a quarter which, having to-day pardoned so many offences which were wilfully and maliciously schemed, will not be, I am sure, obdurate to such as thou, in thy half-reasoning capacity, may have been capable of committing.”

The creature, as is the nature of its tribe, caught from Hereward himself the mode of applying with most effect his gestures and pitiable supplication, while the Emperor, notwithstanding the serious scene which had just past, could not help laughing at the touch of comedy flung into it by this last incident.

“ My trusty Hereward,”—he said aside, “ (I will not again call him Edward if I can help it)—thou art the refuge of the distressed, whether it be man or beast, and nothing that sues through thy intercession, while thou remainest in our service, shall find its supplication in vain. Do thou, good Hereward,” for the name was now pretty well established in his Imperial memory, “ and such of thy companions as know the habits of the

creature, lead him back to his old quarters in the Blacquernal; and that done, my friend, observe that we request thy company, and that of thy faithful mate Bertha, to partake supper at our court, with our wife and daughter, and such of our servants and allies as we shall request to share the same honour. Be assured, that while thou remainest with us, there is no point of dignity which shall not be willingly paid to thee.— And do thou approach, Achilles Tatius, as much favoured by thine Emperor as before this day dawned. What charges are against thee have been only whispered in a friendly ear, which remembers them not, unless (which Heaven forefend!) their remembrance is renewed by fresh offences.”

Achilles Tatius bowed till the plume of his helmet mingled with the mane of his fiery horse, but held it wisest to forbear any answer in words, leaving his crime and his pardon to stand upon those general terms in which the Emperor had expressed them.

Once more the multitude of all ranks returned on their way to the city, nor did any second

interruption arrest their march. Sylvan, accompanied by one or two Varangians, who led him in a sort of captivity, took his way to the vaults of the Blacquernal, which were in fact his proper habitation.

Upon the road to the city, Harpax, the notorious corporal of the Immortal Guards, held a discourse with one or two of his own soldiers, and of the citizens who had been members of the late conspiracy.

“ So,” said Stephanos, the prize-fighter, “ a fine affair we have made of it, to suffer ourselves to be all anticipated and betrayed by a thick-skulled Varangian ; every chance turning against us as they would against Corydon, the shoemaker, if he were to defy me to the circus. Ursel, whose death made so much work, turns out not to be dead after all ; and, what is worse, he lives not to our advantage. This fellow Hereward, who was yesterday no better than myself — What do I say ? — better ! — he was a great deal worse — an insignificant nobody in every respect ! — is now crammed with honours, praises, and gifts, till he wellnigh returns what they

have given him, and the Cæsar and the Acolyte, our associates, have lost the Emperor's love and confidence, and if they are suffered to survive, it must be like the tame domestic poultry, whom we pamper with food one day, that upon the next their necks may be twisted for spit or pot."

"Stephanos," replied the centurion, "thy form of body fits thee well for the Palæstra, but thy mind is not so acutely formed as to detect that which is real from that which is only probable, in the political world, of which thou art now judging. Considering the risk incurred by lending a man's ear to a conspiracy, thou oughtest to reckon it a saving in every particular, where he escapes with his life and character safe. This has been the case with Achilles Tatius, and with the Cæsar. They have remained also in their high places of trust and power, and may be confident that the Emperor will hardly dare to remove them at a future period, since the possession of the full knowledge of their guilt has not emboldened him to do so. Their power, thus left with them, is in fact ours; nor is there a circumstance to be supposed, which can induce them to

betray their confederates to the government. It is much more likely that they will remember them with the probability of renewing, at a fitter time, the alliance which binds them together. Cheer up thy noble resolution, therefore, my Prince of the Circus, and think that thou shalt still retain that predominant influence which the favourites of the amphitheatre are sure to possess over the citizens of Constantinople."

"I cannot tell," answered Stephanos; "but it gnaws at my heart like the worm that dieth not, to see this beggarly foreigner betray the noblest blood in the land, not to mention the best athlete in the Palaestra, and move off not only without punishment for his treachery, but with praise, honour, and preferment."

"True," said Harpax; "but observe, my friend, that he does move off to purpose. He leaves the land, quits the corps in which he might claim preferment and a few vain honours, being valued at what such trifles amount to. Heretoward, in the course of one or two days, shall be little better than a disbanded soldier, subsisting by the poor bread which he can obtain as a

follower of this beggarly Count, or which he is rather bound to dispute with the infidel, by encountering with his battle-axe the Turkish sabres. What will it avail him amidst the disasters, the slaughter, and the famine of Palestine, that he once upon a time was admitted to supper with the Emperor? We know Alexius Comnenus—he is willing to discharge, at the highest cost, such obligations as are incurred to men like this Hereward; and, believe me, I think that I see the wily despot shrug his shoulders in derision, when one morning he is saluted with the news of a battle in Palestine lost by the crusaders, in which his old acquaintance has fallen a dead man. I will not insult thee, by telling thee how easy it might be to acquire the favour of a gentlewoman in waiting upon a lady of quality; nor do I think it would be difficult, should that be the object of the prize-fighter, to acquire the property of a large baboon like Sylvan, which no doubt would set up as a juggler any Frank who had meanness of spirit to propose to gain his bread in such a capacity, from the alms of the starving chivalry of Europe.

But he who can stoop to envy the lot of such a person, ought not to be one whose chief personal distinctions are sufficient to place him first in rank over all the favourites of the amphitheatre."

There was something in this sophistical kind of reasoning, which was but half satisfactory to the obtuse intellect of the prize-fighter, to whom it was addressed, although the only answer which he attempted was couched in this observation:—

"Ay, but, noble centurion, you forget that, besides empty honours, it was proposed that this Varangian Hereward, or Edward, whichever is his name, is promised a mighty donative of gold."

"Marry, you touch me there," said the centurion; "and when you tell me that the promise is fulfilled, I will willingly agree that the Anglo-Saxon hath gained something to be envied for; but while it remains in the shape of a naked promise, you shall pardon me, my worthy Stephanos, if I hold it of no more account than the mere pledges which are distributed among ourselves as well as to the Varangians, promising upon future occasions mints of money,

which we are likely to receive at the same time with the last year's snow. Keep up your heart, therefore, noble Stephanos, and believe not that your affairs are worse for the miscarriage of this day; and let not thy gallant courage sink, but, remembering those principles upon which it was called into action, believe that thy objects are not the less secure because fate has removed their acquisition to a more distant day." The veteran and unbending conspirator, Harpax, thus strengthened for some future renewal of their enterprise the failing spirits of Stephanos.

After this, such leaders as were included in the invitation given by the Emperor, repaired to the evening meal, and, from the general content and complaisance expressed by Alexius and his guests of every description, it could little have been supposed that the day just passed over was one which had inferred a purpose so dangerous and treacherous.

The absence of the Countess Brenhilda, during this eventful day, created no small surprise to the Emperor and those in his immediate confidence, who knew her enterprising spirit, and

the interest she must have felt in the issue of the combat. Bertha had made an early communication to the Count, that his lady, agitated with the many anxieties of the few preceding days, was unable to leave her apartment. The valiant knight, therefore, lost no time in acquainting his faithful Countess of his safety; and afterwards joining those who partook of the banquet at the palace, he bore himself as if the least recollection did not remain on his mind of the perfidious conduct of the Emperor at the conclusion of the last entertainment. He knew, in truth, that the knights of Prince Tancred not only maintained a strict watch round the house where Brenhilda remained, but also, that they preserved a severe ward in the neighbourhood of the Blacquernal, as well for the safety of their heroic leader, as for that of Count Robert, the respected companion of their military pilgrimage.

It was the general principle of the European chivalry, that distrust was rarely permitted to survive open quarrels, and that whatever was forgiven, was dismissed from their recollection, as unlikely to recur; but on the present occasion

there was a more than usual assemblage of troops, which the occurrences of the day had drawn together, so that the crusaders were called upon to be particularly watchful.

It may be believed that the evening passed over without any attempt to renew the ceremonial in the council chamber of the Lions, which had been upon a former occasion terminated in such misunderstanding. Indeed, it would have been lucky, if the explanation between the mighty Emperor of Greece and the chivalrous Knight of Paris, had taken place earlier. For reflection on what had passed, had convinced the Emperor that the Franks were not a people to be imposed upon by pieces of clockwork, and similar trifles, and what they did not understand, was sure, instead of procuring their awe or admiration, to excite their anger and defiance; nor had it altogether escaped Count Robert, that the manners of the eastern people were upon a different scale from those to which he had been accustomed; that they neither were so deeply affected by the spirit of chivalry, nor, in his own language, was the worship of the Lady of the

Broken Lances so congenial a subject of adoration. This notwithstanding, Count Robert observed, that Alexius Comnenus was a wise and politic prince; his wisdom perhaps too much allied to cunning, but yet aiding him to maintain with great address that empire over the minds of his subjects, which was necessary for their good, and for maintaining his own authority. He therefore resolved to receive with equanimity whatever should be offered by the Emperor, either in civility or in the way of jest, and not again to disturb an understanding which might be of advantage to Christendom, by a quarrel founded upon misconception of terms or misapprehension of manners. To this prudent resolution the Count of Paris adhered during the whole evening; with some difficulty, however, since it was somewhat inconsistent with his own fiery and inquisitive temper, which was equally desirous to know the precise amount of whatever was addressed to him, and to take umbrage at it, should it appear in the least degree offensive, whether so intended or not.

CHAPTER X.

It was not until after the conquest of Jerusalem that Count Robert of Paris returned to Constantinople, and, with his wife, and such proportion of his followers as the sword and pestilence had left after that bloody warfare, resumed his course to his native kingdom. Upon reaching Italy, the first care of the noble Count and Countess, was to celebrate in princely style the marriage of Hereward and his faithful Bertha, who had added to their other claims upon their master and mistress, those acquired by Hereward's faithful services in Palestine, and no less by Bertha's affectionate ministry to her lady in Constantinople.

As to the fate of Alexius Comnenus, it may be read at large in the history of his daughter Anna, who has represented him as the hero of

many a victory, achieved, says the purple-born, in the third chapter and fifteenth book of her history, sometimes by his arms and sometimes by his prudence. "His boldness alone has gained some battles, at other times his success has been won by stratagem. He has erected the most illustrious of his trophies by confronting danger, by combating like a simple soldier, and throwing himself bareheaded into the thickest of the foe. But there are others," continues the accomplished lady, "which he gained an opportunity of erecting by assuming the appearance of terror, and even of retreat. In a word, he knew alike how to triumph either in flight or in pursuit, and remained upright even before those enemies who appeared to have struck him down; resembling the military implement termed the calthrop, which remains always upright in whatever direction it is thrown on the ground."

It would be unjust to deprive the Princess of the defence she herself makes against the obvious charge of partiality.

"I must still once more repel the reproach

which some bring against me, as if my history was composed merely according to the dictates of the natural love for parents which is engraved in the hearts of children. In truth, it is not the effect of that affection which I bear to mine, but it is the evidence of matter of fact, which obliges me to speak as I have done. Is it not possible that one can have at the same time an affection for the memory of a father and for truth? For myself, I have never directed my attempt to write history, otherwise than for the ascertainment of the matter of fact. With this purpose, I have taken for my subject the history of a worthy man. Is it just, that, by the single accident of his being the author of my birth, his quality of my father ought to form a prejudice against me, which would ruin my credit with my readers? I have given, upon other occasions, proofs sufficiently strong of the ardour which I had for the defence of my father's interests, which those that know me can never doubt; but, on the present, I have been limited by the inviolable fidelity with which I respect the truth,



which I should have felt conscience to have veiled, under pretence of serving the renown of my father."—*Ibidem*, chap. iii. book xv.

This much we have deemed it our duty to quote, in justice to the fair historian; we will extract also her description of the Emperor's death, and are not unwilling to allow, that the character assigned to the Princess by our own Gibbon, has in it a great deal of fairness and of truth.

Notwithstanding her repeated protests of sacrificing rather to the exact and absolute truth, than to the memory of her deceased parent, Gibbon remarks truly, that "instead of the simplicity of style and narrative which wins a belief, an elaborate affectation of rhetoric and science betrays in every page the vanity of a female author. The genuine character of Alexius is lost in a vague constellation of virtues; and the perpetual strain of panegyric and apology, awakens our jealousy to question the veracity of the historian and the merit of the hero. We cannot, however, refuse her judicious and important remark, that the disorders of the times

were the misfortune and the glory of Alexius; and that every calamity which can afflict a declining empire, was accumulated on his reign by the justice of Heaven and the vices of his predecessors."—GIBBON'S *Roman Empire*, vol. ix. page 83, foot-note.

The Princess accordingly feels the utmost assurance, that a number of signs which appeared in heaven and on earth, were interpreted by the soothsayers of the day as foreboding the death of the Emperor. By these means, Anna Comæna assigned to her father those indications of consequence, which ancient historians represent as necessary intimations of the sympathy of nature with the removal of great characters from the world; but she fails not to inform the Christian reader, that her father's belief attached to none of these prognostics, and that even on the following remarkable occasion he maintained his incredulity:—A splendid statue, supposed generally to be a relic of paganism, holding in its hand a golden sceptre, and standing upon a base of porphyry, was overturned by a tempest, and was generally believed to be an intima-

tion of the death of the Emperor. This, however, he generously repelled. Phidias, he said, and other great sculptors of antiquity, had the talent of imitating the human frame with surprising accuracy; but to suppose that the power of foretelling future events was reposed in these masterpieces of art, would be to ascribe to their makers the faculties reserved by the Deity for himself, when he says, "It is I who kill and make alive." During his latter days, the Emperor was greatly afflicted with the gout, the nature of which has exercised the wit of many persons of science as well as of Anna Comnena. The poor patient was so much exhausted, that when the Empress was talking of most eloquent persons who should assist in the composition of his history, he said, with a natural contempt of such vanities, "The passages of my unhappy life call rather for tears and lamentation than for the praises you speak of."

A species of asthma having come to the assistance of the gout, the remedies of the physicians became as vain as the intercession of the

monks and clergy, as well as the alms which were indiscriminately lavished. Two or three deep successive swoons gave ominous warning of the approaching blow; and at length was terminated the reign and life of Alexius Comnenus, a prince who, with all the faults which may be imputed to him, still possesses a real right, from the purity of his general intentions, to be accounted one of the best sovereigns of the Lower Empire.

For some time, the historian forgot her pride of literary rank, and, like an ordinary person, burst into tears and shrieks, tore her hair, and defaced her countenance, while the Empress Irene cast from her princely habits, cut off her hair, changed her purple buskins for black mourning shoes, and her daughter Mary, who had herself been a widow, took a black robe from one of her own wardrobes, and presented it to her mother. "Even in the moment when she put it on," says Anna Comnena, "the Emperor gave up the ghost, and in that moment the sun of my life set."

We shall not pursue her lamentations farther. She upbraids herself that, after the death of her father, that light of the world, she had also survived Irene, the delight alike of the east and of the west, and survived her husband also. "I am indignant," she said, "that my soul, suffering under such torrents of misfortune, should still deign to animate my body. Have I not," said she, "been more hard and unfeeling than the rocks themselves; and is it not just that one, who could survive such a father and mother, and such a husband, should be subjected to the influence of so much calamity? But let me finish this history, rather than any longer fatigue my readers with my unavailing and tragical lamentation."

Having thus concluded her history, she adds the following two lines:—

"The learned Comnena lays her pen aside,
What time her subject and her father died."

These quotations will probably give the readers as much as they wish to know of the real character of this Imperial historian. Fewer words will suffice to dispose of the other parties

who have been selected from her pages, as persons in the foregoing drama.

There is very little doubt that the Count Robert of Paris, whose audacity in seating himself upon the throne of the Emperor gives a peculiar interest to his character, was in fact a person of the highest rank; being no other, as has been conjectured by the learned Du Cange, than an ancestor of the house of Bourbon, which has so long given kings to France. He was a successor, it has been conceived, of the Counts of Paris, by whom the city was valiantly defended against the Normans, and an ancestor of Hugh Capet. There are several hypotheses upon this subject, deriving the well-known Hugh Capet, first from the family of Saxony; secondly, from St Arnoul, afterwards Bishop of Altex; third, from Nibilong; fourth, from the Duke of Bavaria; and, fifth, from a natural son of the Emperor Charlemagne. Variouslly placed, but in each of these contested pedigrees, appears this Robert, sur-

named the *Strong*, who was Count of that district, of which Paris was the capital, most peculiarly styled the County, or Isle of France. Anna Comnena, who has recorded the bold usurpation of the Emperor's seat by this haughty chieftain, has also acquainted us with his receiving a severe, if not a mortal wound, at the battle of Dorylæum, owing to his neglecting the warlike instructions with which her father had favoured him on the subject of the Turkish wars. The antiquary who is disposed to investigate this subject, may consult the late Lord Ashburnham's elaborate Genealogy of the Royal House of France; also a note of Du Cange's on the Princess's history, p. 362, arguing for the identity of her "Robert of Paris, a haughty barbarian," with the "Robert called the Strong," mentioned as an ancestor of Hugh Capet. Gibbon, vol. xi, p. 52, may also be consulted. The French antiquary and the English historian seem alike disposed to find the church, called in the tale that of the Lady of the Broken Lances, in that dedicated to St Drusas, or Drosin of Loissins, who was supposed to have peculiar influ-

ence on the issue of combats, and to be in the habit of determining them in favour of such champions as spent the night preceding at his shrine.

In consideration of the sex of one of the parties concerned, the author has selected our Lady of the Broken Lances, as a more appropriate patroness than St Drusas himself, for the Amazons, who were not uncommon in that age. Gæta, for example, the wife of Robert Guiscard, a redoubted hero, and the parent of a most heroic race of sons, was herself an Amazon, fought in the foremost ranks of the Normans, and is repeatedly commemorated by our Imperial historian, Anna Comnena.

The reader can easily conceive to himself that Robert of Paris distinguished himself among his brethren-at-arms and fellow-crusaders. His fame resounded from the walls of Antioch; but, at the battle of Dorylæum, he was so desperately wounded, as to be disabled from taking a part in the grandest scene of the expedition. His heroic Countess, however, enjoyed the great satisfaction of mounting the walls of Jerusalem,

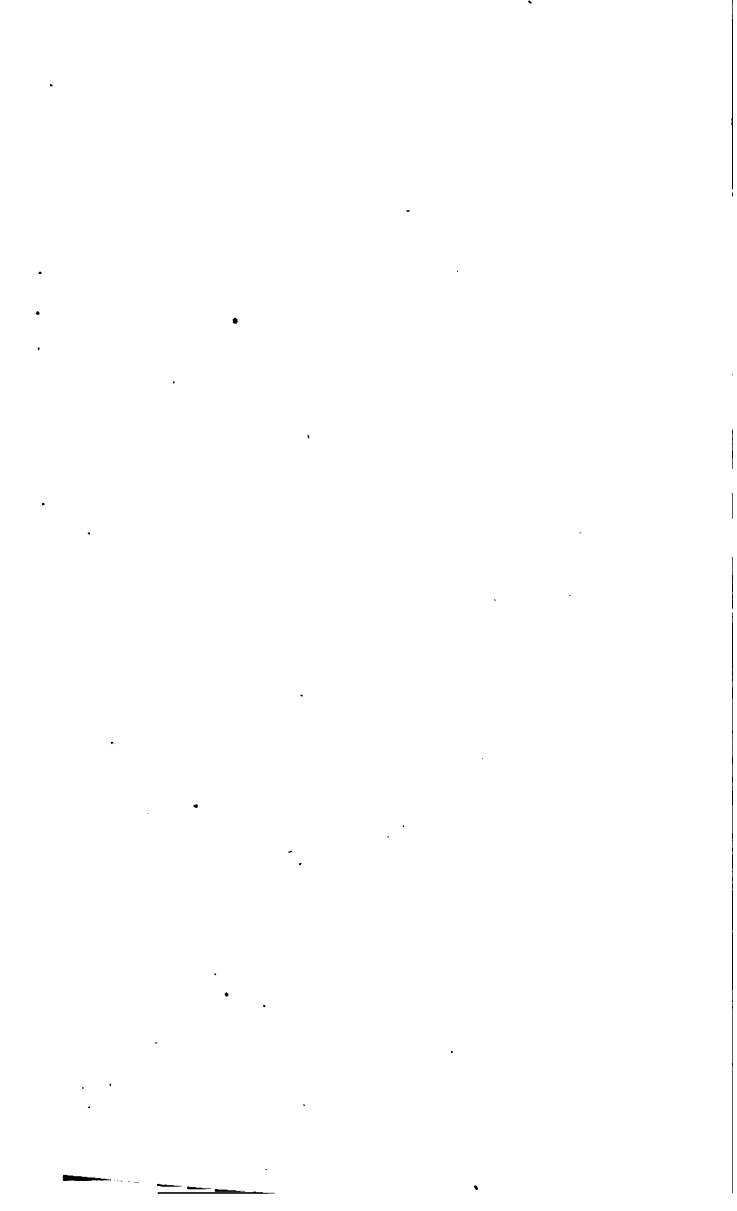
and in so far discharging her own vows and those of her husband. This was the more fortunate, as the sentence of the physicians pronounced that the wounds of the Count had been inflicted by a poisoned weapon, and that complete recovery was only to be hoped for by having recourse to his native air. After some time spent in the vain hope of averting by patience this unpleasant alternative, Count Robert subjected himself to necessity, or what was represented as such, and, with his wife and the faithful Hereward, and all others of his followers who had been like himself disabled from combat, took the way to Europe by sea.

A light galley, procured at a high rate, conducted them safely to Venice, and from that then glorious city, the moderate portion of spoil which had fallen to the Count's share among the conquerors of Palestine, served to convey them to his own dominions, which, more fortunate than those of most of his fellow pilgrims, had been left uninjured by their neighbours during the time of their proprietor's absence on the Crusade. The report that the Count had lost

his health, and the power of continuing his homage to the Lady of the Broken Lances, brought upon him the hostilities of one or two ambitious or envious neighbours, whose covetousness was, however, sufficiently repressed by the brave resistance of the Countess and the resolute Hereward. Less than a twelvemonth was required to restore the Count of Paris to his full health, and to render him, as formerly, the assured protector of his own vassals, and the subject in whom the possessors of the French throne reposed the utmost confidence. This latter capacity enabled Count Robert to discharge his debt towards Hereward in a manner as ample as he could have hoped or expected. Being now respected alike for his wisdom and his sagacity, as much as he always was for his intrepidity and his character as a successful crusader, he was repeatedly employed by the court of France in settling the troublesome and intricate affairs in which the Norman possessions of the English crown involved the rival nations. William Rufus was not insensible to his merit, nor blind to the importance of gaining his good will; and

finding out his anxiety that Hereward should be restored to the land of his fathers, he took, or made an opportunity, by the forfeiture of some rebellious noble, of conferring upon our Varangian a large district adjacent to the New Forest, being part of the scenes which his father chiefly frequented, and where, it is said, the descendants of the valiant squire and his Bertha have subsisted for many a long year, surviving turns of time and chance, which are in general fatal to the continuance of more distinguished families.

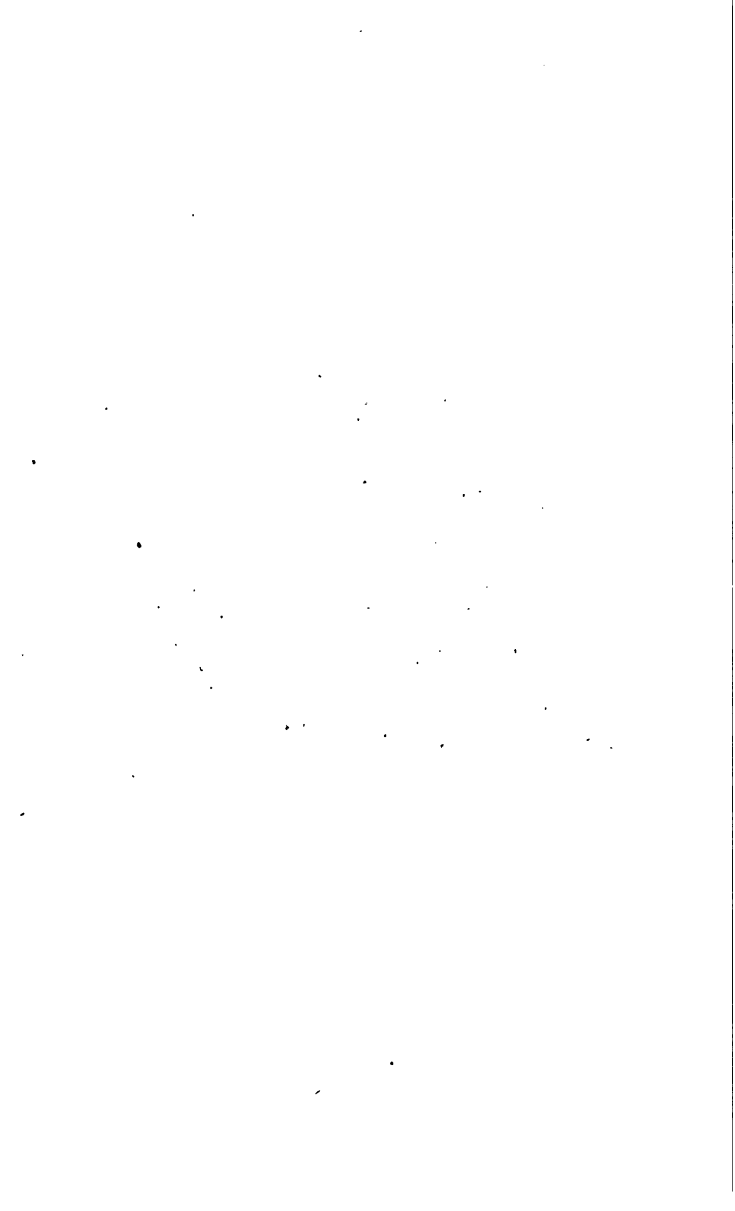
END OF COUNT ROBERT OF PARIS.



CASTLE DANGEROUS.

As I stood by yon roofless tower,
Where the wa'flower scents the dewy air,
Where the howlet mourns in her ivy bower,
And tells the midnight moon her care ;
The winds were laid, the air was still,
The stars they shot along the sky ;
The fox was howling on the hill,
And the distant echoing glens reply.

ROBERT BURNS.



CASTLE DANGEROUS.



CHAPTER I.

Hosts have been known at that dread sound to yield,
And, Douglas dead, his name hath won the field.

JOHN HOME.

It was at the close of an early spring day, when nature, in a cold province of Scotland, was reviving from her winter's sleep, and the air at least, though not the vegetation, gave promise of an abatement of the rigour of the season, that two travellers, whose appearance at that early period sufficiently announced their wandering character, which, in general, secured a free passage even through a dangerous country, were seen coming from the south-westward, within a few miles of the Castle of Douglas, and seemed

to be holding their course in the direction of the river of that name, whose dale afforded a species of approach to that memorable feudal fortress. The stream, small in comparison to the extent of its fame, served as a kind of drain to the country in its neighbourhood, and at the same time afforded the means of a rough road to the castle and village. The high lords to whom the castle had for ages belonged, might, had they chosen, have made this access a great deal smoother and more convenient; but there had been as yet little or no exercise for those geniuses, who have taught all the world that it is better to take the more circuitous road round the base of a hill, than the direct course of ascending it on the one side, and descending it directly on the other, without yielding a single step to render the passage more easy to the traveller; still less were those mysteries dreamed of, which M'Adam has of late days expounded. But, indeed, to what purpose should the ancient Douglasses have employed his principles, even if they had known them in ever so much perfection? Wheel-carriages, except of the most clumsy description, and for the most

simple operations of agriculture, were totally unknown. Even the most delicate female had no resource save a horse, or, in case of sore infirmity, a litter. The men used their own sturdy limbs, or hardy horses, to transport themselves from place to place; and travellers, females in particular, experienced no small inconvenience from the rugged nature of the country. A swollen torrent sometimes crossed their path, and compelled them to wait until the waters had abated their frenzy. The bank of a small river was occasionally torn away by the effects of a thunder-storm, a recent inundation, or the like convulsions of nature; and the wayfarer relied upon his knowledge of the district, or obtained the best local information in his power, how to direct his path so as to surmount such untoward obstacles.

The Douglas issues from an amphitheatre of mountains which bounds the valley to the southwest, from whose contributions, and the aid of sudden storms, it receives its scanty supplies. The general aspect of the country is that of the pastoral hills of the south of Scotland, forming

as is usual, bleak and wild farms, many of which had, at no great length of time from the date of the story, been covered with trees; as some of them still attest by bearing the name of *shaw*, that is, wild natural wood. The neighbourhood of the Douglas water itself was flat land, capable of bearing strong crops of oats and rye, supplying the inhabitants with what they required of these productions. At no great distance from the edge of the river, a few special spots excepted, the soil capable of agriculture was more and more mixed with the pastoral and woodland country, till both terminated in desolate and partly inaccessible moorlands.

Above all, it was war-time, and of necessity all circumstances of mere convenience were obliged to give way to a paramount sense of danger; the inhabitants, therefore, instead of trying to amend the paths which connected them with other districts, were thankful that the natural difficulties which surrounded them rendered it unnecessary to break up or to fortify the access from other more open countries. Their wants, with a very few exceptions, were completely

supplied, as we have already said, by the rude and scanty produce of their own mountains and *holms*,* the last of which served for the exercise of their limited agriculture, while the better part of the mountains and forest glens produced pasture for their herds and flocks. The recesses of the unexplored depths of these silvan retreats being seldom disturbed, especially since the lords of the district had laid aside, during this time of strife, their constant occupation of hunting, the various kinds of game had increased of late very considerably; so that not only in crossing the rougher parts of the hilly and desolate country we are describing, different varieties of deer were occasionally seen, but even the wild cattle peculiar to Scotland sometimes showed themselves, and other animals, which indicated the irregular and disordered state of the period. The wild cat was frequently surprised in the dark ravines or the swampy thickets; and

* *Holm*, or flat plains, by the sides of the brooks and rivers, termed in the south, *Ings*.

the wolf, already a stranger to the more populous districts of the Lothians, here maintained his ground against the encroachments of man, and was still himself a terror to those by whom he was finally to be extirpated. In winter especially, and winter was hardly yet past, these savage animals were wont to be driven to extremity for lack of food, and used to frequent, in dangerous numbers, the battle-field, the deserted churchyard—nay, sometimes the abodes of living men, there to watch for children, their defenceless prey, with as much familiarity as the fox now-a-days will venture to prowl near the mistress's* poultry-yard.

From what we have said, our readers, if they have made—as who in these days has not—the Scottish tour, will be able to form a tolerably just idea of the wilder and upper part of Douglas Dale, during the earlier period of the fourteenth century. The setting sun cast his gleams

* The good dame, or wife of a respectable farmer, is almost universally thus designated in Scotland.

along a moorland country, which to the westward broke into larger swells, terminating in the mountains called the Larger and Lesser Cairntable. The first of these is, as it were, the father of the hills in the neighbourhood, the source of an hundred streams, and by far the largest of the ridge, still holding in his dark bosom, and in the ravines with which his sides are ploughed, considerable remnants of those ancient forests with which all the high grounds of that quarter were once covered, and particularly the hills, in which the rivers—both those which run to the east, and those which seek the west to discharge themselves into the Solway—hide, like so many hermits, their original and scanty sources.

The landscape was still illuminated by the reflection of the evening sun, sometimes thrown back from pool or stream; sometimes resting on grey rocks, huge cumberers of the soil, which labour and agriculture have since removed, and sometimes contenting itself with gilding the banks of the stream, tinged alternately grey, green, or ruddy, as the ground itself consisted of

rock, or grassy turf, or bare earthen mound, or looked at a distance like a rampart of dark red porphyry. Occasionally, too, the eye rested on the steep brown extent of moorland, as the sunbeam glanced back from the little tarn or mountain pool, whose lustre, like that of the eye in the human countenance, gives a life and vivacity to every feature around.

The elder and stouter of the two travellers whom we have mentioned, was a person well, and even showily dressed, according to the finery of the times, and bore at his back, as wandering minstrels were wont, a case, containing a small harp, rote, or viol, or some such species of musical instrument for accompanying the voice. The leathern case announced so much, although it proclaimed not the exact nature of the instrument. The colour of the traveller's doublet was blue, that of his trowsers or pantaloons violet, with slashes which showed a lining of the same colour with the jerkin. A mantle ought, according to ordinary custom, to have covered this dress, but the heat of the sun, though the season was so early, had induced the wearer to fold up his

cloak in small compass, and form it into a bundle, attached to the shoulders like the military great-coat of the infantry soldier of the present day. The neatness with which it was made up, argued the precision of a practised traveller, who had been long accustomed to every resource which change of weather required. A great profusion of narrow ribands or points, constituting the loops with which our ancestors connected their doublet and trowsers, formed a kind of cordon, composed of knots of blue or violet, which surrounded the traveller's person, and thus assimilated in colour with the two garments which it was the office of these strings to combine. The bonnet usually worn with this showy dress, was of that kind with which Henry the Eighth and his son, Edward the Sixth, are usually represented. It was more fitted, from the gay stuff of which it was composed, to appear in a public place, than to encounter a storm of rain. It was party-coloured, being made of different stripes of blue and violet; and the wearer arrogated a certain degree of gentility to himself, by wearing a plume of considerable dimensions

of the same favourite colours. The features over which this feather drooped were in no degree remarkable for peculiarity of expression. Yet, in so desolate a country as the west of Scotland, it would not have been easy to pass the man without more minute attention than he would have met with where there was more in the character of the scenery to arrest the gaze of the passengers.

A quick eye, a sociable look, seeming to say, "Ay, look at me, I am a man worth noticing, and not unworthy your attention," carried with it, nevertheless, an interpretation which might be thought favourable or otherwise, according to the character of the person whom the traveller met. A knight or soldier would merely have thought that he had met a merry fellow, who could sing a wild song, or tell a wild tale, and help to empty a flagon, with all the accomplishments necessary for a boon companion at an hostelry, except perhaps an alacrity at defraying his share of the reckoning. A churchman, on the other hand, might have thought he of the blue and violet was of too loose habits, and accustom-

ed too little to limit himself within the boundaries of beeseeming mirth, to be fit society for one of his sacred calling. Yet the Man of Song had a certain steadiness of countenance, which seemed fitted to hold place in scenes of serious business, as well as of gayety. A wayfaring passenger of wealth, not at that time a numerous class, might have feared in him a professional robber, or one whom opportunity was very likely to convert into such; a female might have been apprehensive of uncivil treatment; and a youth, or timid person, might have thought of murder, or such direful doings. Unless privately armed, however, the minstrel was ill accoutred for any dangerous occupation. His only visible weapon was a small crooked sword, like what we now call a hanger; and the state of the times would have justified any man, however peaceful his intentions, for being so far armed against the perils of the road. If a glance at this man had in any respect prejudiced him in the opinion of those whom he met on his journey, a look at his companion would, so far as his character could be guessed at—for he was closely muffled up—

have passed for an apology and warrant for his associate.

The younger traveller was apparently in early youth, a soft and gentle boy, whose Sclavonic gown, the appropriate dress of the pilgrim, he wore more closely drawn about him than the coldness of the weather seemed to authorize or recommend. His features, imperfectly seen under the hood of his pilgrim's dress, were prepossessing in a high degree ; and though he wore a walking sword, it seemed rather to be in compliance with general fashion than from any violent purpose that he did so. There were traces of sadness upon his brow, and of tears upon his cheeks ; and his weariness was such, as even his rougher companion seemed to sympathize with, while he privately participated also in the sorrow which left its traces upon a countenance so lovely. They spoke together, and the eldest of the two, while he assumed the deferential air proper to a man of inferior rank addressing a superior, showed, in tone and gesture, something that amounted to interest and affection.

“ Bertram, my friend,” said the younger of

the two, "how far are we still from Douglas Castle? We have already come farther than the thirty miles, which thou didst say was the distance from Cammock—or how didst thou call the last hostelry which we left by daybreak?"

"Cumnock, my dearest lady—I beg ten thousand excuses—my gracious young lord."

"Call me Augustine," replied his comrade, "if you mean to speak as is fittest for the time."

"Nay, as for that," said Bertram, "if your ladyship can condescend to lay aside your quality, my own good-breeding is not so firmly sewed to me but that I can doff it, and resume it again without its losing a stitch; and since your ladyship, to whom I am sworn in obedience, is pleased to command that I should treat you as my own son, shame it were to me if I were not to show you the affection of a father, more especially as I may well swear my great oath, that I owe you the duty of such, though well I wot it has, in our case, been the lot of the father to be maintained by the kindness and liberality of the son; for when was it that I hungered or

thirsted, and the *black stock** of Berkeley did not relieve my wants?"

"I would have it so," said the young lady, whose pilgrim's dress was so shaped as to give her the air of the other sex; "I would have it so. What use of the mountains of beef, and the oceans of beer, which they say our domains produce, if there is a hungry heart among our vassalage, or especially if thou, Bertram, who hast served as the minstrel of our house for more than twenty years, shouldst experience such a feeling?"

"Certes, lady," answered Bertram, "it would be like the catastrophe which is told of the Baron of Fastenough, when his last mouse was starved to death in the very pantry; and if I escape this journey without such a calamity, I shall think myself out of reach of thirst or famine for the whole of my life."

"Thou hast suffered already once or twice by these attacks, my poor friend," said the lady.

"It is little," answered Bertram, "any thing

* The table dormant, which stood in a baron's hall, was often so designated.

that I have suffered; and I were ungrateful to give the inconvenience of missing a breakfast, or meeting an untimely dinner, so serious a name. But then I hardly see how your ladyship can endure this gear much longer. You must yourself feel, that the plodding along these high lands, of which the Scots give us such good measure in their miles, is no jesting matter; and as for Douglas Castle, why it is nearly as distant as five miles, not to say any thing of what the Scots call a *bittock*, which in their way of accounting is at least a mile to boot."

"The question then is," quoth the lady, heaving a sigh, "what we are to do when we have so far to travel, and when the castle gates must be locked long before we arrive there?"

"For that I will pledge my word," answered Bertram. "The gates of Douglas, under the keeping of Sir John de Walton, do not open so easily as those of the buttery hatch at our own castle, when it is well oiled; and if your ladyship take my advice, you will turn southward ho! and in two days at farthest, we shall be in a land where men's wants are provided for, as the

inns proclaim it, with the least possible delay, and the secret of this little journey shall never be known to living mortal but ourselves, as sure as I am sworn minstrel and man of faith."

"I thank thee for thy advice, mine honest Bertram," said the lady, "but I cannot profit by it. Should thy knowledge of these parts possess thee with an acquaintance with any decent house, whether it belong to rich or poor, I would willingly take quarters there, if I could obtain them from this time until to-morrow morning. The gates of Douglas Castle will then be open to guests of so peaceful an appearance as we carry with us, and—and—it will out—we might have time to make such applications to our toilet as might ensure us a good reception, by drawing a comb through our locks, or such like foppery."

"Ah, madam!" said Bertram, "were not Sir John de Walton in question, methinks I should venture to reply, that an unwashed brow, an unkempt head of hair, and a look far more saucy than your ladyship ever wears, or can wear, were the proper disguise to trick out that minstrel's

boy, whom you wish to represent in the present pageant."

"Do you suffer your youthful pupils to be indeed so slovenly and so saucy, Bertram?" answered the lady. "I for one will not imitate them in that particular; and whether Sir John be now in the Castle of Douglas or not, I will treat the soldiers who hold so honourable a charge with a washed brow, and a head of hair somewhat ordered. As for going back without seeing a castle which has mingled even with my very dreams—at a word, Bertram, thou mayst go that way, but I will not."

"And if I part with your ladyship on such terms," responded the minstrel, "now your frolic is so nearly accomplished, it shall be the foul fiend himself, and nothing more comely or less dangerous, that shall tear me from your side; and for lodging, there is not far from hence the house of one Tom Dickson of Hazelside, one of the most honest fellows of the dale, and who, although a labouring man, ranked as high as a warrior, when I was in this country, as any

noble gentleman that rode in the band of the Douglas."

"He is, then, a soldier?" said the lady.

"When his country or his lord need his sword," replied Bertram—"and, to say the truth, they are seldom at peace; but otherwise, he is no enemy, save to the wolf which plunders his herds."

"But forget not, my trusty guide," replied the lady, "that the blood in our veins is English, and consequently, that we are in danger from all who call themselves foes to the ruddy Cross."

"Do not fear this man's faith," answered Bertram. "You may trust to him as to the best knight or gentleman of the land. We may make good our lodging by a tune or a song; and it may remember you that I undertook (provided it pleased your ladyship) to temporize a little with the Scots, who, poor souls, love minstrelsy, and when they have but a silver penny, will willingly bestow it to encourage the *gay science*—I promised you, I say, that we should be as welcome to them as if we had been born amidst

their own wild hills; and for the best that such house as Dickson's affords, the glee-man's son, fair lady, shall not breathe a wish in vain. And now, will you speak your mind to your devoted friend and adopted father, or rather your sworn servant and guide, Bertram the Minstrel, what it is your pleasure to do in this matter?"

"O, we will certainly accept of the Scot's hospitality," said the lady, "your minstrel word being plighted that he is a true man.—Tom Dickson, call you him?"

"Yes," replied Bertram, "such is his name; and by looking on these sheep, I am assured that we are now upon his estate."

"Indeed!" said the lady, with some surprise; "and how is your wisdom aware of that?"

"I see the first letter of his name marked upon this flock," answered the guide. "Ah, learning is what carries a man through the world, as well as if he had the ring by virtue of which old minstrels tell that Adam understood the language of the beasts in Paradise. Ah, madam! there is more wit taught in the shepherd's shiel-

ing than the lady thinks of, who sews her painted seam in her summer bower."

"Be it so, good Bertram. And although not so deeply skilled in the knowledge of written language as you are, it is impossible for me to esteem its value more than I actually do; so hold we on the nearest road to this Tom Dickson's, whose very sheep tell of his whereabouts. I trust we have not very far to go, although the knowledge that our journey is shortened by a few miles has so much recovered my fatigue, that methinks I could dance all the rest of the way."

CHAPTER II.

Rosalind. Well, this is the Forest of Arden.

Touchstone. Aye, now am I in Arden ; the more fool I. When I was at home I was in a better place ; but travellers must be content.

Ros. Aye, be so, good Touchstone.—Look you, who comes here ; a young man and an old, in solemn talk.

As You Like It.—Scene IV. Act II.

As the travellers spoke together, they reached a turn of the path which presented a more extensive prospect than the broken face of the country had yet shown them. A valley, through which flowed a small tributary stream, exhibited the wild, but not unpleasant, features of “a lone vale of green braken ;” here and there besprinkled with groups of alder-trees, of hazels, and of copse oakwood, which had maintained their stations in the recesses of the valley, although they had vanished from the loftier and

more exposed sides of the hills. The farm-house, or mansion-house, (for, from its size and appearance, it might have been the one or the other,) was a large but low building, and the walls of the out-houses were sufficiently strong to resist any band of casual depredators. There was nothing, however, which could withstand a more powerful force; for, in a country laid waste by war, the farmer was then, as now, obliged to take his chance of the great evils attendant upon that state of things; and his condition, never a very eligible one, was rendered considerably worse by the insecurity attending it. About half a mile farther was seen a Gothic building of very small extent, having a half-dismantled chapel, which the minstrel pronounced to be the Abbey of Saint Bride. "The place," he said, "I understand is allowed to subsist, as two or three old monks and as many nuns, whom it contains, are permitted by the English to serve God there, and sometimes to give relief to Scottish travellers; and who have accordingly taken assurance with Sir John de Walton, and accepted as their superior a churchman on whom

he thinks he can depend. But if these guests happen to reveal any secrets, they are, by some means or other, believed to fly towards the English governor; and therefore, unless your ladyship's commands be positive, I think we had best not trust ourselves to their hospitality."

"Of a surety, no," said the lady, "if thou canst provide me with lodgings where we shall have more prudent hosts."

At this moment, two human forms were seen to approach the farm-house in a different direction from the travellers, and speaking so high, in a tone apparently of dispute, that the minstrel and his companion could distinguish their voices though the distance was considerable. Having skreened his eyes with his hand for some minutes, Bertram at length exclaimed, "By Our Lady, it is my old friend, Tom Dickson, sure enough!—What can make him in such bad humour with the lad, who, I think, may be the little wild boy, his son Charles, who used to run about and plait rushes some twenty years ago. It is lucky, however, we have found our friends astir; for, I warrant, Tom hath a hearty piece

of beef in the pot ere he goes to bed, and he must have changed his wont if an old friend hath not his share ; and who knows, had we come later, at what hour they may now find it convenient to drop latch and draw bolt so near a hostile garrison ; for if we call things by their right names, such is the proper term for an English garrison in the castle of a Scottish nobleman.”

“ Foolish man,” answered the lady, “ thou judgest of Sir John de Walton as thou wouldst of some rude boor, to whom the opportunity of doing what he wills is a temptation and license to exercise cruelty and oppression. Now, I could plight you my word, that, setting apart the quarrel of the kingdoms, which, of course, will be fought out in fair battle on both sides, you will find that English and Scottish, within this domain, and within the reach of Sir John de Walton’s influence, live together as that same flock of sheep and goats do with the shepherd’s dog ; a foe from whom they fly upon certain occasions, but around whom they nevertheless eagerly gather for protection should a wolf happen to show himself.”

“It is not to your ladyship,” answered Bertram, “that I should venture to state my opinion of such matters; but the young knight, when he is sheathed in armour, is a different being from him who feasts in halls among press of ladies; and he that feeds by another man’s fireside, and when his landlord, of all men in the world, chances to be the Black Douglas, has reason to keep his eyes about him as he makes his meal:—but it were better I looked after our own evening refreshment, than that I stood here gaping and talking about other folk’s matters.” So saying, he called out in a thundering tone of voice, “Dickson!—what ho, Thomas Dickson!—will you not acknowledge an old friend, who is much disposed to trust his supper and night’s lodging to your hospitality?”

The Scotchman, attracted by the call, looked first along the banks of the river, then upwards to the bare side of the hill, and at length cast his eyes upon the two figures who were descending from it.

As if he felt the night colder while he advanced from the more sheltered part of the valley

to meet them, the Douglas Dale farmer wrapped closer around him the grey plaid, which, from an early period, has been used by the shepherds of the south of Scotland, and the appearance of which gives a romantic air to the peasantry and middle classes; and which, although less brilliant and gaudy in its colours, is as picturesque in its arrangement as the more military tartan mantle of the Highlands. When they approached near to each other, the lady might observe that this friend of her guide was a stout athletic man, somewhat past the middle of life, and already showing marks of the approach but none of the infirmities of age, upon a countenance which had been exposed to many a storm. Sharp eyes too, and a quick observation, exhibited signs of vigilance, acquired by one who had lived long in a country where he had constant occasion for looking around him with caution. His features were still swollen with displeasure; and the handsome young man who attended him seemed to be discontented, like one who had undergone no gentle marks of his father's indignation, and who, from the sullen expression which mingled with an ap-

pearance of shame on his countenance, seemed at once affected by anger and remorse.

“Do you not remember me, old friend?” said Bertram, as they approached within a distance for communing; “or have the twenty years which have marched over us since we met, carried along with them all remembrance of Bertram, the English minstrel?”

“In troth,” answered the Scot, “it is not for want of plenty of your countrymen to keep you in my remembrance, and I have hardly heard one of them so much as whistle

‘Hey, now the day dawns,’

but it has recalled some note of your blithe rebeck; and yet such animals are we, that I had forgot the mien of my old friend, and scarcely knew him at a distance. But we have had trouble lately; there are a thousand of your countrymen that keep garrison in the Perilous Castle of Douglas yonder, as well as in other places through the vale, and that is but a woful sight for a true Scotchman—even my own poor house has not escaped the dignity of a garrison

of a man-at-arms, besides two or three archer knaves, and one or two slips of mischievous boys called pages, and so forth, who will not let a man say, 'this is my own,' by his own fireside. Do not, therefore, think hardly of me, old comrade, if I show you a welcome something colder than you might expect from a friend of other days; for, by Saint Bride of Douglas, I have scarcely any thing left to which I can say welcome."

"Small welcome will serve," said Bertram. "My son, make thy reverence to thy father's old friend. Augustine is learning my joyous trade, but he will need some practice ere he can endure its fatigues. If you could give him some little matter of food, and a quiet bed for the night, there's no fear but that we shall both do well enough; for I dare say when you travel with my friend Charles there,—if that tall youth chance to be my old acquaintance, Charles,—you will find yourself accommodated when his wants are once well provided for."

"Nay, the foul fiend take me if I do," answered the Scottish husbandman. "I know not what the lads of this day are made of—not of

the same clay as their fathers to be sure—not sprung from the heather, which fears neither wind nor rain, but from some delicate plant of a foreign country, which will not thrive unless it be nourished under glass, with a murrain to it. The good Lord of Douglas—I have been his henchman, and can vouch for it—did not in his pagehood desire such food and lodging as, in the present day, will hardly satisfy such a lad as your friend Charles.”

“Nay,” said Bertram, “it is not that my Augustine is over nice; but, for other reasons, I must request of you a bed to himself; he hath of late been unwell.”

“Ay, I understand,” said Dickson, “your son hath a touch of that illness which terminates so frequently in the black death you English folk die of? We hear much of the havoc it has made to the southward. Comes it hitherward?”

Bertram nodded.

“Well, my father’s house,” continued the farmer, “hath more rooms than one, and your son shall have one well-aired and comfortable; and for supper, ye shall have a part of what is

prepared for your countrymen, though I would rather have their room than their company. Since I am bound to feed a score of them, they will not dispute the claim of such a skilful minstrel as thou art to a night's hospitality. I am ashamed to say that I must do their bidding even in my own house. Well-a-day, if my good lord were in possession of his own, I have heart and hand enough to turn the whole of them out of my house, like—like"——

“To speak plainly,” said Bertram, “like a southron strolling gang from Redesdale, whom I have seen you fling out of your house like a litter of blind puppies, when not one of them looked behind to see who had done him the courtesy until he was half-way to Cairntable.”

“Ay,” answered the Scotchman, drawing himself up at least six inches taller than before; “then I had a house of my own, and a cause and an arm to keep it. Now I am—what signifies it what I am?—the noblest lord in Scotland is little better.”

“Truly, friend,” said Bertram, “now you view this matter in a rational light. I do not say

that the wisest, the richest, or the strongest man in this world has any right to tyrannize over his neighbour, because he is the more weak, ignorant, and the poorer; but yet if he does enter into such a controversy, he must submit to the course of nature, and that will always give the advantage in the tide of battle to wealth, strength, and health."

"With permission, however," answered Dickson, "the weaker party, if he use his faculties to the utmost, may, in the long run, obtain revenge upon the author of his sufferings, which would be at least compensation for his temporary submission; and he acts simply as a man, and most foolishly as a Scotchman, whether he sustain these wrongs with the insensibility of an idiot, or whether he endeavour to revenge them before Heaven's appointed time has arrived.—But if I talk thus, I shall scare you, as I have scared some of your countrymen, from accepting a meal of meat, and a night's lodging, in a house where you might be called with the morning to a bloody settlement of a national quarrel."

"Never mind," said Bertram, "we have been

known to each other of old ; and I am no more afraid of meeting unkindness in your house, than you expect me to come here for the purpose of adding to the injuries of which you complain."

" So be it," said Dickson ; " and you, my old friend, are as welcome to my abode as when it never held any guest save of my own inviting. —And you, my young friend, Master Augustine, shall be looked after as well as if you came with a gay brow and a light cheek, such as best becomes the *gay science*."

" But wherefore, may I ask," said Bertram, " so much displeas'd but now at my young friend Charles ?"

The youth answered before his father had time to speak. " My father, good sir, may put what show upon it he will, but shrewd and wise men wax weak in the brain in these troublous times. He saw two or three wolves seize upon three of our choicest wethers ; and because I shouted to give the alarm to the English garrison, he was angry as if he could have murdered me—just for saving the sheep from the jaws that would have devoured them."

“ This is a strange account of thee, old friend,” said Bertram. “ Dost thou connive with the wolves in robbing thine own folds ?”

“ Why, let it pass, if thou lovest me,” answered the countryman ; “ Charles could tell thee something nearer the truth, if he had a mind ; but for the present let it pass.”

The minstrel, perceiving that the Scotchman was fretted and embarrassed with the subject, pressed it no farther.

At this moment, in crossing the threshold of Thomas Dickson’s house, they were greeted with sounds from two English soldiers within. “ Quiet, Anthony,” said one voice,—“ quiet, man !—for the sake of common sense, if not common manners ;—Robin Hood himself never sat down to his board ere the roast was ready.”

“ Ready !” quoth another rough voice ; “ it is roasting to rags, and small had been the knave Dickson’s share even of these rags, had it not been the express orders of the worshipful Sir John de Walton, that the soldiers who lie at outposts should afford to the inmates such provisions as are not necessary for their own subsistence.”

“ Hush, Anthony,—hush, for shame !” replied his fellow soldier, “ if ever I heard our host’s step, I heard it this instant ; so give o’er thy grumbling, since our captain, as we all know, hath prohibited, under strict penalties, all quarrels between his followers and the people of the country.”

“ I am sure,” replied Anthony, “ that I have ministered occasion to none ; but I would I were equally certain of the good meaning of this sullen-browed Thomas Dickson towards the English soldiers, for I seldom go to bed in this dungeon of a house, but I expect my throat will gape as wide as a thirsty oyster before I awaken. Here he comes, however,” added Anthony, sinking his sharp tones as he spoke ; “ and I hope to be excommunicated if he has not brought with him that mad animal, his son Charles, and two other strangers, hungry enough, I’ll be sworn, to eat up the whole supper, if they do us no other injury.”

“ Shame of thyself, Anthony,” repeated his comrade ; “ a good archer thou as ever wore Kendal green, and yet affect to be frightened for

two tired travellers, and alarmed for the inroad their hunger may make on the night's meal. There are four or five of us here—we have our bows and our bills within reach, and scorn to be chased from our supper, or cheated out of our share of it, by a dozen Scotchmen, whether stationary or strollers. How say'st thou?" he added, turning to Dickson—"How say ye, quartermaster? it is no secret, that by the directions given to our post, we must enquire into the occupations of such guests as you may receive besides ourselves, your unwilling inmates; you are as ready for supper, I warrant, as supper is for you, and I will only delay you and my friend Anthony, who becomes dreadfully impatient, until you answer two or three questions which you wot of."

"Bend-the-Bow," answered Dickson, "thou art a civil fellow; and although it is something hard to be constrained to give an account of one's friends, because they chance to quarter in one's own house for a night or two, yet I must submit to the times, and make no vain opposition. You may mark down in your breviary there,

that upon the fourteenth day before Palm Sunday, Thomas Dickson brought to his house of Hazelside, in which you hold garrison, by orders from the English governor Sir John de Walton, two strangers, to whom the said Thomas Dickson had promised refreshment, and a bed for the evening, if it be lawful at this time and place."

"But what are they these strangers?" said Anthony, somewhat sharply.

"A fine world the while," murmured Thomas Dickson, "that an honest man should be forced to answer the questions of every paltry companion!"—But he mitigated his voice and proceeded. "The eldest of my guests is Bertram, an ancient English minstrel, who is bound on his own errand to the Castle of Douglas, and will communicate what he has to say of news to Sir John de Walton himself. I have known him for twenty years, and never heard any thing of him, save that he was good man and true. The younger stranger is his son, a lad recovering from the English disorder, which has been raging far and wide in Westmoreland and Cumberland."

“Tell me,” said Bend-the-Bow, “this same Bertram, was he not about a year since in the service of some noble lady in our own country?”

“I have heard so,” answered Dickson.

“We shall, in that case, I think, incur little danger,” replied Bend-the-Bow; “by allowing this old man and his son to proceed on their journey to the castle.”

“You are my older and my better,” answered Anthony; “but I may remind you that it is not so clearly our duty to give free passage, into a garrison of a thousand men of all ranks, to a youth who has been so lately attacked by a contagious disorder; and I question if our commander would not rather hear that the Black Douglas, with a hundred devils as black as himself, since such is his colour, had taken possession of the outpost of Hazelside with sword and battle-axe, than that one person who suffered under this fell sickness had entered peaceably, and by the opened wicket of the castle.”

“There is something in what thou sayest, Anthony,” replied his comrade; “and considering that our governor, since he has undertaken

the troublesome job of keeping a castle which is esteemed so much more dangerous than any other within Scotland, has become one of the most cautious and jealous men in the world, we had better, I think, inform him of the circumstance, and take his commands how the stripling is to be dealt with."

"Content am I," said the archer; "and first, methinks, I would just, in order to show that we know what belongs to such a case, ask the stripling a few questions, as how long he has been ill, by what physicians he has been attended, when he was cured, and how his cure is certified," &c.

"True, brother," said Bend-the-Bow. "Thou hearest, minstrel, we would ask thy son some questions—What has become of him?—he was in this apartment but now."

"So please you," answered Bertram, "he did but pass through the apartment. Master Thomas Dickson, at my entreaty, as well as in respectful reverence to your honours' health, carried him through the room without tarrance, judging his own bedchamber the fittest place.

for a young man recovering from a severe illness, and after a day of no small fatigue."

"Well," answered the elder archer, "though it is uncommon for men who, like us, live by bow-string and quiver, to meddle with interrogations and examinations; yet, as the case stands, we must make some enquiries of your son, ere we permit him to set forth to the Castle of Douglas, where you say his errand leads him."

"Rather my errand, noble sir," said the minstrel, "than that of the young man himself."

"If such be the case," answered Bend-the-Bow, "we may sufficiently do our duty by sending yourself, with the first grey light of dawn, to the castle, and letting your son remain in bed, which I warrant is the fittest place for him, until we shall receive Sir John de Walton's commands whether he is to be brought onward or not."

"And we may as well," said Anthony, "since we are to have this man's company at supper, make him acquainted with the rules of the out garrison stationed here for the time." So

saying, he pulled a scroll from his leathern pouch, and said, "minstrel, canst thou read?"

"It becomes my calling," said the minstrel.

"It has nothing to do with mine, though," answered the archer, "and therefore do thou read these regulations aloud; for since I do not comprehend these characters by sight, I lose no chance of having them read over to me as often as I can, that I may fix their sense in my memory. So beware that thou readest the words letter for letter as they are set down; for thou dost so at thy peril, Sir Minstrel, if thou readest not like a true man."

"On my minstrel word," said Bertram, and began to read excessively slow; for he wished to gain a little time for consideration, which he foresaw would be necessary to prevent his being separated from his mistress, which was likely to occasion her much anxiety and distress. He therefore began thus:—"Outpost at Hazelside, the steading of Goodman Thomas Dickson"—Ay, Thomas, and is thy house so called?"

"It is the ancient name of the steading," said;

the Scot, "being surrounded by a hazel-shaw, or thicket."

"Hold your chattering tongue, minstrel," said Anthony, "and proceed, as you value that or your ears, which you seem disposed to make less use of."

"His garrison," proceeded the minstrel, reading, "'consists of a lance with its furniture.' What, then, a lance, in other words, a belted knight, commands this party?"

"'Tis no concern of thine," said the archer.

"But it is," answered the minstrel; "we have a right to be examined by the highest person in presence."

"I will show thee, thou rascal," said the archer, starting up, "that I am lance enough for thee to reply to, and I will break thy head if thou say'st a word more."

"Take care, brother Anthony," said his comrade, "we are to use travellers courteously and, with your leave, those travellers best who come from our native land."

"It is even so stated here," said the minstrel, and he proceeded to read:—

“ ‘ The watch at this outpost of Hazelside shall stop and examine all travellers passing by the said station, suffering such to pass onwards to the town of Douglas, or to Douglas Castle, always interrogating them with civility, and detaining and turning them back if there arise matter of suspicion ; but conducting themselves in all matters civilly and courteously to the people of the country, and to those who travel in it.’ You see, most excellent and valiant archer,” added the commentator Bertram, “ that courtesy and civility are, above all, recommended to your worship in your conduct towards the inhabitants, and those passengers who, like us, may chance to fall under your rules in such matters.”

“ I am not to be told at this time of day,” said the archer, “ how to conduct myself in the discharge of my duties. Let me advise you, Sir Minstrel, to be frank and open in your answers to our enquiries, and you shall have no reason to complain.”

“ I hope, at all events,” said the minstrel, “ to have your favour for my son, who is a delicate

stripling, and not accustomed to play his part among the crew which inhabit this wild world."

"Well," continued the elder and more civil of the two archers, "if thy son be a novice in this terrestrial navigation, I warrant that thou, my friend, from thy look and manner of speech, hast enough of skill to use thy compass. To comfort thee, although thou must thyself answer the questions of our governor or deputy governor, in order that he may see there is no offence in thee, I think there may be permission granted for thy son's residing here in the convent hard by, (where the nuns, by the way, are as old as the monks, and have nearly as long beards, so thou mayst be easy about thy son's morals,) until thou hast done thy business at Douglas Castle, and art ready to resume thy journey."

"If such permission," said the minstrel, "can be obtained, I should be better pleased to leave him at the abbey, and go myself, in the first place, to take the directions of your commanding officer."

"Certainly," answered the archer, "that will be the safest and best way; and with a piece or

two of money, thou mayst secure the protection of the abbot."

"Thou say'st well," answered the minstrel; "I have known life, I have known every style, gap, pathway, and pass of this wilderness of ours for some thirty years; and he that cannot steer his course fairly through it like an able seaman, after having served such an apprenticeship, can hardly ever be taught, were a century to be given him to learn it in."

"Since thou art so expert a mariner," answered the archer Anthony, "thou hast, I warrant me, met in thy wanderings a potation called a morning's draught, which they who are conducted by others, where they themselves lack experience, are used to bestow upon those who undertake the task of guide upon such an occasion?"

"I understand you, sir," quoth the minstrel, "and although money, or *drink-geld*, as the Fleming calls it, is rather a scarce commodity in the purse of one of my calling, yet, according to my feeble ability, thou shalt have no cause to complain that thine eyes or those of thy com-

rades have been damaged by a Scottish mist, while we can find an English piece of money to pay for the good liquor which should wash them clear."

"Content," said the archer; "we now understand each other; and if difficulties arise on the road, thou shalt not want the countenance of Anthony to sail triumphantly through them. But thou hadst better let thy son know soon of the early visit to the abbot to-morrow, for thou mayst guess that we cannot and dare not delay our departure for the convent a minute after the eastern sky is ruddy; and, with other infirmities, young men often are prone to laziness and a love of ease."

"Thou shalt have no reason to think so," answered the minstrel; "not the lark himself, when waked by the first ray peeping over the black cloud, springs more lightly to the sky, than will my Augustine answer the same brilliant summons to-morrow morning. And now we understand each other, I would only further pray you to forbear light talk while my son is

in your company,—a boy of innocent life, and timid in conversation.”

“Nay, jolly minstrel,” said the elder archer, “thou givest us here too gross an example of Satan reproving sin. If thou hast followed thy craft for twenty years, as thou pretendest, thy son, having kept thee company since childhood, must by this time be fit to open a school to teach even devils the practice of the seven deadly sins, of which none know the theory if those of the *gay science* are lacking.”

“Truly, comrade, thou speakest well,” answered Bertram, “and I acknowledge that we minstrels are too much to blame in this matter. Nevertheless, in good sooth, the fault is not one of which I myself am particularly guilty; on the contrary, I think that he who would wish to have his own hair honoured when time has strewed it with silver, should so rein his mirth when in the presence of the young, as may show in what respect he holds innocence. I will, therefore, with your permission, speak a word to Augustine, that to-morrow we must be on foot early.”

“Do so, my friend,” said the English soldier;

“and do the same the more speedily that our poor supper is still awaiting until thou art ready to partake of it.”

“To which, I promise thee,” said Bertram, “I am disposed to entertain no delay.”

“Follow me, then,” said Dickson, “and I will show thee where this young bird of thine has his nest.”

Their host accordingly tripped up the wooden stair, and tapped at a door, which he thus indicated was that of his younger guest.

“Your father,” continued he, as the door opened, “would speak with you, Master Augustine.”

“Excuse me, my host,” answered Augustine; “the truth is, that this room being directly above your eating-chamber, and the flooring not in the best possible repair, I have been compelled to the unhandsome practice of eavesdropper, and not a word has escaped me that passed concerning my proposed residence at the abbey, our journey to-morrow, and the somewhat early hour at which I must shake off sloth, and, according to thy expression, fly down from the roost.”

“ And how dost thou relish,” said Dickson, “ being left with the Abbot of Saint Bride’s little flock here ?”

“ Why, well,” said the youth, “ if the abbot is a man of respectability becoming his vocation, and not one of those swaggering churchmen, who stretch out the sword, and bear themselves like rank soldiers in these troublous times.”

“ For that, young master,” said Dickson, “ if you let him put his hand deep enough into your purse, he will hardly quarrel with any thing.”

“ Then I will leave him to my father,” replied Augustine, “ who will hardly grudge him any thing he asks in reason.”

“ In that case,” replied the Scotchman, “ you may trust to our abbot for good accommodation—and so both sides are pleased.”

“ It is well, my son,” said Bertram, who now joined in the conversation ; “ and that thou mayst be ready for thy early travelling, I shall presently get our host to send thee some food, after partaking of which thou shouldst go to bed and sleep off the fatigue of to-day, since to-morrow will bring work for itself.”

“ And as for thy engagement to these honest archers,” answered Augustine, “ I hope you will be able to do what will give pleasure to our guides, if they are disposed to be civil and true men.”

“ God bless thee, my child !” answered Bertram ; “ thou knowest already what would drag after your beck all the English archers that were ever at Cressy or Poitiers. There is no fear of a grey goose shaft, if you sing a *reveillez* like to that which chimed even now from that silken nest of dainty young goldfinches.”

“ Hold me as in readiness, then,” said the seeming youth, “ when you depart to-morrow morning. I am within hearing, I suppose, of the bells of Saint Bride’s chapel, and have no fear, through my sloth, of keeping you or your company waiting.”

“ Good-night, and God bless thee, my child !” again said the minstrel ; “ remember that your father sleeps not far distant, and on the slightest alarm will not fail to be with you. I need scarce bid thee recommend thyself, meantime, to the

great Being, who is the friend and father of us all."

The pilgrim thanked his supposed father for his evening blessing, and the visitors withdrew without farther speech at the time, leaving the young lady to those engrossing fears, which, the novelty of her situation, and the native delicacy of her sex being considered, naturally thronged upon her.

The tramp of a horse's foot was not long after heard at the house of Hazelside, and the rider was welcomed by its garrison with marks of respect. Bertram understood so much as to discover from the conversation of the warders that this late arrival was Aymer de Valence, the knight who commanded the little party, and to the furniture of whose lance, as it was technically called, belonged the archers with whom we have already been acquainted, a man-at-arms or two, a certain proportion of pages or grooms, and, in short, the command and guidance of the garrison at Thomas Dickson's, while in rank he was deputy-governor of Douglas Castle.

To prevent all suspicion respecting himself

and his companion, as well as the risk of the latter being disturbed, the minstrel thought it proper to present himself to the inspection of this knight, the great authority of the little place. He found him, with as little scruple as the archers heretofore, making a supper of the relics of the roast beef.

Before this young knight Bertram underwent an examination, while an old soldier took down in writing such items of information as the examinee thought proper to express in his replies, both with regard to the minutiae of his present journey, his business at Castle Douglas, and his route when that business should be accomplished; a much more minute examination, in a word, than he had hitherto undergone by the archers, or perhaps than was quite agreeable to him, being encumbered with at least the knowledge of one secret, whatever more. Not that this new examiner had any thing stern or severe in his looks or his questions. As to the first, he was mild, gentle, and "modest as a maid," and possessed exactly of the courteous manners ascribed by our father Chaucer to the young *élève* of chi-

valry whom he describes upon his pilgrimage to Canterbury. But with all his gentleness, young Aymer de Valence showed a great degree of acuteness and accuracy in his queries; and well pleased was Bertram that the young knight did not insist upon seeing his supposed son, although even in that case his ready wit had resolved, like a seaman in a tempest, to sacrifice one part to preserve the rest. He was not, however, driven to this extremity, being treated by Sir Aymer de Valence with that degree of courtesy which in that age men of song were in general thought entitled to. The knight kindly and liberally consented to the lad's remaining in the convent, as a fit and quiet residence for a stripling and an invalid, until the governor, Sir John de Watton, should express his pleasure on the subject; and Sir Aymer consented to this arrangement the more willingly, as it averted all possible danger of bringing disease into the English garrison.

By the young knight's order, all in Dickson's house were dispatched earlier to rest than usual; the matin bell of the neighbouring cha-

pel being the signal for their assembly by day-break in the morning. They rendezvoused accordingly, and proceeded to Saint Bride's, where they heard mass, after which an interview took place between the Abbot Jerome and the minstrel Bertram, in which the former undertook, with the permission of Sir Aymer de Valence, to receive young Augustine into his abbey as a guest for a few days, less or more, and for which Bertram promised an acknowledgment in name of alms, which was amply satisfactory.

“ So be it,” said Bertram, taking leave of his supposed son, “ and rely on it I will not tarry a day longer at Douglas Castle than shall suffice for transacting my business there, which is to look after the old books you wot of, and I will speedily return for thee to the Abbey of Saint Bride, and resume in company our journey homeward.”

“ O father,” replied the youth, with a smile, “ I fear, if you get among romances and chronicles, and the contents of a fine old library, you will be so earnest in your researches, that you will forget poor Augustine and his concerns.”

“ Never fear me, Augustine,” said the old man, making the motion of throwing a kiss towards the boy, “ thou art good and virtuous, and Heaven will not neglect thee were thy father unnatural enough to do so. Believe me, all the old songs since Merlin’s day shall not make me forget thee.”

Thus they separated, the minstrel, with the English knight and his retinue, to move towards the castle, and the youth in dutiful attendance on the venerable abbot, who was delighted to find that his guest’s thoughts turned rather upon spiritual things than the morning repast, of the approach of which he could not help being himself sensible.

CHAPTER III.

“ This night, methinks, is but the daylight sick,
It looks a little paler; 'tis a day
Sunk [as the day is when the sun is hid.”

Merchant of Venice.

To facilitate the progress of the party on its way to Douglas Castle, the Knight of Valence offered the minstrel the convenience of a horse, which the fatigues of yesterday made him gladly accept. Any one acquainted with equestrian exercise, is aware that no means of refreshment carries away the sense of fatigue from over walking so easily, as the exchange to riding, which calls into exercise another set of muscles, and leaves those which have been over exerted an opportunity of resting through change of motion, more completely than they could in abso-

lute repose. Sir Aymer de Valence was sheathed in armour, and mounted on his charger; two of the archers, a groom of mean rank, and a squire, who looked in his day for the honour of knighthood, completed the detachment, which seemed so disposed as to secure the minstrel from escape, and to protect him against violence. "Not," said the young knight, addressing himself to Bertram, "that there is usually danger in travelling in this country, any more than in the most quiet districts of England; but some disturbances, as you may have learnt, have broken out here within this last year, and have caused the garrison of Castle Douglas to maintain a stricter watch. But let us move on, for the complexion of the day is congenial with the original derivation of the name of the country, and the description of the chiefs to whom it belonged—*Sholto Dhu Glass*—(see yon dark grey man), and dark grey will our route prove this morning, though by good luck it is not long."

The morning was indeed what the original Gaelic words implied, "a drizzly, dark, moist

day;" the mist had settled upon the hills, and unrolled itself upon brook, glade, and tarn, and the spring breeze was not powerful enough to raise the veil, though from the wild sounds which were heard occasionally on the ridges, and through the glens, it might be supposed to wail at a sense of its own inability. The route of the travellers was directed by the course which the river had ploughed for itself down the valley, the waters of which bore in general that dark grey livery which Sir Aymer de Valence had intimated to be the prevalent tint of the country. Some ineffectual struggles of the sun shot a ray here and there to salute the peaks of the hills; yet these were unable to surmount the dulness of a March morning, and, at so early an hour, produced a variety of shades, rather than a gleam of brightness, upon the eastern horizon. The view was monotonous and depressing, and apparently the good knight Aymer sought some amusement in occasional talk with Bertrams, who, as was usual with his craft, possessed a fund of knowledge, and a power of conversation, well suited to pass away a dull morning. The minstrel, well pleased to

pick up such information as he might be able concerning the present state of the country, embraced every opportunity of sustaining the dialogue.

“ I would speak with you, Sir Minstrel,” said the young knight. “ If thou dost not find the air of this morning too harsh for thine organs, heartily do I wish thou wouldst fairly tell me what can have induced thee, being, as thou seemest, a man of sense, to thrust thyself into a wild country like this, at such a time.—And you, my masters,” addressing the archers, and the rest of the party, “ methinks it would be as fitting and seeming if you reined back your steeds for a horse’s length or so, since I apprehend you can travel on your way without the pastime of minstrelsy.” The bowmen took the hint, and fell back, but, as was expressed by their grumbling observations, by no means pleased that there seemed little chance of their overhearing what conversation should pass between the young knight and the minstrel, which proceeded as follows :—

“ I am, then, to understand, good minstrel,”

said the knight, "that you, who have in your time borne arms, and even followed Saint George's red-cross banner to the Holy Sepulchre, are so little tired of the danger attending our profession, that you feel yourself attracted unnecessarily to regions where the sword, forever loose in its scabbard, is ready to start on the slightest provocation?"

"It would be hard," replied the minstrel bluntly, "to answer such a question in the affirmative; and yet, when you consider how nearly allied is his profession who celebrates deeds of arms with that of the knight who performs them, your honour, I think, will hold it advisable that a minstrel desirous of doing his devoir, should, like a young knight, seek the truth of adventures where it is to be found, and rather visit countries where the knowledge is preserved of high and noble deeds, than those lazy and quiet realms, in which men live indolently, and die ignobly in peace, or by sentence of law. You yourself, sir, and those like you, who hold life cheap in respect of glory, guide your course through this world on the very same principle which

brings your poor rhyming servant Bertram from a far province of merry England, to this dark country of rugged Scotland called Douglas Dale. You long to see adventures worthy of notice, and I (under favour for naming us two in the same breath) seek a scanty and precarious, but not a dishonourable living, by preparing for immortality, as well as I can, the particulars of such exploits, especially the names of those who were the heroes of these actions. Each, therefore, labours in his vocation; nor can the one be justly wondered at more than the other, seeing that if there be any difference in the degrees of danger to which both the hero and the poet are exposed, the courage, strength, arms, and address of the valiant knight, render it safer for him to venture into scenes of peril, than for the poor man of rhyme."

"You say well," answered the warrior; "and although it is something of novelty to me to hear your craft represented as upon a level with my own mode of life, yet shame were it to say that the minstrel who toils so much to keep in memory the feats of gallant knights, should not

himself prefer fame to existence, and a single achievement of valour to a whole age without a name, or to affirm that he follows a mean and unworthy profession."

"Your worship will then acknowledge," said the minstrel, "that it is a legitimate object in such as myself, who, simple as I am, have taken my regular degrees among the professors of the *gay science* at the capital town of Aigues-Mortes, to struggle forward into this northern district, where I am well assured many things have happened which have been adapted to the harp by minstrels of great fame in ancient days, and have become the subject of lays which lie deposited in the library of Castle Douglas, where, unless copied over by some one who understands the old British characters and language, they must, with whatever they may contain, whether of entertainment or edification, be speedily lost to posterity. If these hidden treasures were preserved and recorded by the minstrel art of my poor self and others, it might be held well to compensate for the risk of a chance blow of a broadsword, or the sweep of a brown bill, re-

ceived while I am engaged in collecting them ; and I were unworthy of the name of a man, much more of an inventor or finder,* should I weigh the loss of life, a commodity always so uncertain, against the chance of that immortality which will survive in my lay after my broken voice and shivered harp shall no longer be able either to express tune or accompany tale."

"Certainly," said Sir Aymer, "having a heart to feel such a motive, you have an undoubted right to express it; nor should I have been in any degree disposed to question it, had I found many minstrels prepared, like yourself, to prefer renown even to life itself, which most men think of greatly more consequence."

"There are, indeed, noble sir," replied Bertram, "minstrels, and, with your reverence, even belted knights themselves, who do not sufficiently value that renown which is acquired at the risk

* The name of *Maker* stands for *Poet* (with the original sense of which word it exactly corresponds) in the old Scottish language. That of *Trouveur*, or Troubadour—Finder, in short—has a similar meaning, and almost in every country the poetical tribes have been graced with the same epithets, inferring the property of those who employ invention or creation.

of life. To such ignoble men we must leave their own reward—let us abandon to them earth, and the things of earth, since they cannot aspire to that glory which is the *best* reward of others.”

The minstrel uttered these last words with such enthusiasm, that the knight drew his bridle, and stood fronting Bertram, with his countenance kindling at the same theme, on which, after a short silence, he expressed himself with a like vivacity.

“ Well fare thy heart, gay companion ! I am happy to see there is still so much enthusiasm surviving in the world. Thou hast fairly won the minstrel groat ; and if I do not pay it in conformity to my sense of thy merit, it shall be the fault of dame Fortune, who has graced my labours in these Scottish wars with the niggard pay of Scottish money. A gold piece or two there must be remaining of the ransom of one French knight, whom chance threw into my hands, and that, my friend, shall surely be thine own ; and hark thee, I, Aymer de Valence, who now speak to thee, am born of the noble House of Pembroke ; and though now landless, shall, by

the grace of Our Lady, have in time a fitting establishment, wherein I will find room for a minstrel like thee, if thy talents have not by that time found thee a better patron."

"Thank thee, noble knight," said the minstrel, "as well for thy present intentions, as I hope I shall for thy future performance; but I may say with truth, that I have not the sordid inclination of many of my brethren."

"He who partakes the true thirst of noble fame," said the young knight, "can have little room in his heart for the love of gold. But thou hast not yet told me, friend minstrel, what are the motives, in particular, which have attracted thy wandering steps to this wild country?"

"Were I to do so," replied Bertram, rather desirous to avoid the question, as in some respects too nearly bordering on the secret purpose of his journey, "it might sound like a studied panegyric on thine own bold deeds, Sir Knight, and those of your companions in arms; and such adulation, minstrel as I am, I hate like an empty cup at a companion's lips. But let me say in few words, that Douglas Castle, and the deeds

of valour which it has witnessed, have sounded wide through England; nor is there a gallant knight or trusty minstrel, whose heart does not throb at the name of the stronghold, which, in former days, the foot of an Englishman never entered, except in hospitality. There is a magic in the very names of Sir John de Walton and Sir Aymer de Valence, the gallant defenders of a place so often won back by its ancient lords, and with such circumstances of valour and cruelty, that it bears, in England, the name of the Dangerous Castle."

"Yet I would fain hear," answered the knight, "your own minstrel account of those legends which have induced you, for the amusement of future times, to visit a country which, at this period, is so distracted and perilous."

"If you can endure the length of a minstrel tale," said Bertram—"I for one am always amused by the exercise of my vocation, and have no objection to tell my story, provided you do not prove an impatient listener."

"Nay, for that matter," said the young knight; "a fair listener thou shalt have of me,

and if my reward be not great, my attention at least shall be remarkable."

"And he," said the minstrel, "must be a poor gleeman who does not hold himself better paid with that, than with gold or silver, were the pieces English rose-nobles. On this condition, then, I begin a long story, which may, in one or other of its details, find subject for better minstrels than myself, and be listened to by such warriors as you hundreds of years hence."

CHAPTER IV.

While many a merry lay and many a song
Cheer'd the rough road, we wish'd the rough road long ;
The rough road then returning in a round,
Mark'd their impatient steps, for all was fairy ground.

DR JOHNSON.

“ It was about the year of redemption one thousand twelve hundred and eighty-five years,” began the minstrel, “ when King Alexander the Third of Scotland lost his daughter Margaret, whose only child, of the same name, called the Maiden of Norway, (as her father was king of that country,) became the heiress of this kingdom of Scotland, as well as of her father’s crown. An unhappy death was this for Alexander, who had no nearer heirs left of his own body than this grandchild. She indeed might claim his kingdom by birthright ; but the difficulty of establishing such a claim of inheritance must have

been anticipated by all who bestowed a thought upon the subject. The Scottish king, therefore, endeavoured to make up for his loss by replacing his late queen, who was an English princess, sister of our Edward the First, with Juletta, daughter of the Count de Dreux. The solemnities at the nuptial ceremony, which took place in the town of Jedburgh, were very great and remarkable, and particularly when, amidst the display of a pageant which was exhibited on the occasion, a ghastly spectre made its appearance in the form of a skeleton, as the King of Terrors is said to be represented.—Your worship is free to laugh at this, if you think it a proper subject for mirth; but men are alive who viewed it with their own eyes, and the event showed too well of what misfortunes this apparition was the singular prognostication.”

“ I have heard the story,” said the knight; “ but the monk who told it me, suggested that the figure, though unhappily chosen, was perhaps purposely introduced as a part of the pageant.”

“ I know not that,” said the minstrel dryly;

“but there is no doubt that shortly after this apparition King Alexander died, to the great sorrow of his people. The Maid of Norway, his heiress, speedily followed her grandfather to the grave, and our English king, Sir Knight, raked up a claim of dependency and homage, due, he said, by Scotland, which neither the lawyers, nobles, priests, nor the very minstrels of Scotland, had ever before heard of.”

“Now, beshrew me,” interrupted Sir Aymer de Valence, “this is beyond bargain. I agreed to hear your tale with patience, but I did not pledge myself that it should contain matter to the reproach of Edward the First, of blessed memory; nor will I permit his name to be mentioned in my hearing without the respect due to his high rank and noble qualities.”

“Nay,” said the minstrel, “I am no Highland bagpiper or genealogist, to carry respect for my art so far as to quarrel with a man of worship who stops me at the beginning of a pibroch. I am an Englishman, and wish dearly well to my country; and, above all, I must speak the truth. But I will avoid disputable topics. Your age,

sir, though none of the ripest, authorizes me to suppose you may have seen the battle of Falkirk, and other onslaughts in which the competition of Bruce and Baliol has been fiercely agitated, and you will permit me to say, that if the Scottish have not had the right upon their side, they have at least defended the wrong with the efforts of brave men and true."

"Of brave men, I grant you," said the knight, "for I have seen no cowards amongst them; but as for truth, they can best judge of it who know how often they have sworn faith to England, and how repeatedly they have broken their vow."

"I shall not stir the question," said the minstrel, "leaving it to your worship to determine which has most falsehood—he who compels a weaker person to take an unjust oath, or he who, compelled by necessity, takes the imposed oath without the intention of keeping his word."

"Nay, nay," said De Valence, "let us keep our opinions, for we are not likely to force each other from the faith we have adopted on this subject. But take my advice, and whilst thou travellest under an English pennon, take heed that

thou keepest off this conversation in the hall and kitchen, where perhaps the soldier may be less tolerant than the officer; and now, in a word, what is thy legend of this Dangerous Castle?"

"For that," replied Bertram, "methinks your worship is most likely to have a better edition than I, who have not been in this country for many years; but it is not for me to bandy opinions with your knightship. I will even proceed with the tale as I have heard it. I need not, I presume, inform your worship that the Lords of Douglas, who founded this castle, are second to no lineage in Scotland in the antiquity of their descent. Nay, they have themselves boasted that their family is not to be seen or distinguished, like other great houses, until it is found at once in a certain degree of eminence. 'You may see us in the tree,' they say, 'you cannot discover us in the twig; you may see us in the stream, you cannot trace us to the fountain.' In a word, they deny that historians or genealogists can point out the first mean man named Douglas, who originally elevated the family; and true it is, that so long as we

have known this race, they have always been renowned for valour and enterprise, accompanied with the power which made that enterprise effectual."

"Enough," said the knight, "I have heard of the pride and power of that great family, nor does it interest me in the least to deny or detract from their bold claims to consideration in this respect."

"Without doubt you must also have heard, noble sir," replied the minstrel, "many things of James, the present heir of the house of Douglas?"

"More than enough," answered the English knight; "he is known to have been a stout supporter of that outlawed traitor, William Wallace; and again, upon the first raising of the banner by this Robert Bruce, who pretends to be King of Scotland, this young springald, James Douglas, must needs start into rebellion anew. He plunders his uncle, the Archbishop of St Andrews, of a considerable sum of money, to fill the Scottish Usurper's not over-burdened treasury, debauches the servants of his relation,

takes arms, and, though repeatedly chastised in the field, still keeps his vaunt, and threatens mischief to those who, in the name of his rightful sovereign, defend the Castle of Douglas Dale."

"It is your pleasure to say so, Sir Knight," replied Bertram; "yet I am sure, were you a Scot, you would with patience hear me tell over what has been said of this young man by those who have known him, and whose account of his adventures shows how differently the same tale may be told. These men talk of the present heir of this ancient family as fully adequate to maintain and augment its reputation; ready, indeed, to undergo every peril in the cause of Robert the Bruce, because the Bruce is esteemed by him his lawful king; and sworn and devoted, with such small strength as he can muster, to revenge himself on those Southrons, who have, for several years, as he thinks, unjustly, possessed themselves of his father's abode."

"O," replied Sir Aymer de Valence, "we have heard much of his achievements in this respect, and of his threats against our governor and

ourselves; yet we think it scarce likely that Sir John de Walton will move from Douglas Dale without the King's order, although this James Douglas, a mere chicken, take upon himself to crack his voice by crowing like a cock of the game."

"Sir," answered Bertram, "our acquaintance is but brief, and yet I feel it has been so beneficial to me, that I trust there is no harm in hoping that James Douglas and you may never meet in bodily presence till the state of the two countries shall admit of peace being between you."

"Thou art obliging, friend," answered Sir Aymer, "and, I doubt not, sincere; and truly thou seemest to have a wholesome sense of the respect due to this young knight, when men talk of him in his native valley of Douglas. For me, I am only poor Aymer of Valence, without an acre of land, or much hope of acquiring any, unless I cut something huge with my broadsword out of the middle of these hills. Only this, good minstrel, if thou livest to tell my story, may I pray thee to use thy scrupulous custom of searching out the verity, and whether I live or die thou

shalt not, I think, discover that thy late acquaintance of a spring morning hath added more to the laurels of James of Douglas, than any man's death must give to him by whose stronger arm, or more lucky chance, it is his lot to fall."

"I nothing fear you, Sir Knight," said the minstrel, "for yours is that happy brain, which, bold in youth as beseems a young knight, is in more advanced life the happy source of prudent counsel, of which I would not, by an early death, wish thy country to be deprived."

"Thou art so candid, then, as to wish Old England the benefit of good advice," said Sir Aymer, "though thou leanest to the side of Scotland in the controversy?"

"Assuredly, Sir Knight," said the minstrel, "since in wishing that England and Scotland each knew their own true interest, I am bound to wish them both alike well; and they should, I think, desire to live in friendship together. Occupying each their own portion of the same island, and living under the same laws, and being at peace with each other, they might, without fear, face the enmity of the whole world."

“ If thy faith be so liberal,” answered the knight, “ as becomes a good man, thou must certainly pray, Sir Minstrel, for the success of England in the war, by which alone these murderous hostilities of the northern nation can end in a solid peace. The rebellions of this obstinate country are but the struggles of the stag when he is mortally wounded; the animal grows weaker and weaker with every struggle, till his resistance is effectually tamed by the hand of death.”

“ Not so, Sir Knight,” said the minstrel; “ if my creed is well taught me, we ought not so to pray. We may, without offence, intimate in our prayers the end we wish to obtain; but it is not for us, poor mortals, to point out to an all-seeing Providence the precise manner in which our petitions are to be accomplished, or to wish the downfall of a country to end its commotions, as the death-stab terminates the agonies of the wounded stag. Whether I appeal to my heart or to my understanding, the dictate would be to petition Heaven for what is just and equal in the case; and if I should fear for thee, Sir Knight, in an encounter with James of Douglas, it is only

because he upholds, as I conceive, the better side of the debate; and powers more than earthly have presaged to him success."

"Do you tell me so, Sir Minstrel," said De Valence, in a threatening tone, "knowing me and my office!"

"Your personal dignity and authority," said Bertram, "cannot change the right into wrong, or avert what Providence has decreed to take place. You know, I must presume, that the Douglas hath, by various devices, already contrived to make himself master of this Castle of Douglas three several times, and that Sir John de Walton, the present governor, holds it with a garrison trebled in force, and under the assurance that if, without surprise, he should keep it from the Scottish power for a year and day, he shall obtain the barony of Douglas, with its extensive appendages, in free property for his reward; while, on the other hand, if he shall suffer the fortress during this space to be taken, either by guile or by open force, as has happened successively to the holders of the Dangerous Castle, he will become liable to dishonour as a

knight, and to attainder as a subject; and the chiefs who take share with him, and serve under him, will share also in his guilt and his punishment?"

"All this I know well," said Sir Aymer; "and I only wonder that, having become public, the conditions have, nevertheless, been told with so much accuracy; but what has this to do with the issue of the combat, if the Douglas and I should chance to meet? I will not surely be disposed to fight with less animation because I wear my fortune upon my sword, or become coward because I fight for a portion of the Douglas's estate, as well as for fame and for fatherland? And after all"——

"Hear me," said the minstrel; "an ancient gleeman has said, that in a false quarrel there is no true valour, and the *los* or praise won therein, is, when balanced against honest fame, as valueless as a wreath formed out of copper, compared to a chaplet of pure gold; but I bid you not take me for thy warrant in this important question. Thou well knowest how James of Thirlwall; the last English commander before Sir John de Wal-

ton, was surprised, and the castle sacked with circumstances of great inhumanity."

"Truly," said Sir Aymer, "I think that Scotland and England both have heard of that onslaught, and of the disgusting proceedings of the Scottish chieftain, when he caused transport into the wild forest gold, silver, ammunition, and armour, and all things that could be easily removed, and destroyed a large quantity of provisions, in a manner equally savage and unheard-of."

"Perhaps, Sir Knight," said Bertram, "you were yourself an eyewitness of that transaction, which has been spoken of far and wide, and is called the Douglas Larder."

"I saw not the actual accomplishment of the deed," said De Valence; "that is, I witnessed it not a-doing, but I beheld enough of the sad relics to make the Douglas Larder never by me to be forgotten as a record of horror and abomination. I would speak it truly, by the hand of my father and by my honour as a knight! and I will leave it to thee to judge whether it was a deed calculated to secure the smiles of

Heaven in favour of the actors. This is my edition of the story :—

“ A large quantity of provisions had during two years or thereabouts been collected from different points, and the Castle of Douglas, newly repaired, and, as was thought, carefully guarded, was appointed as the place where the said provisions were to be put in store for the service of the King of England, or of the Lord Clifford, whichever should first enter the Western Marches with an English army, and stand in need of such a supply. This army was also to relieve our wants, I mean those of my uncle the Earl of Pembroke, who for some time before had lain with a considerable force in the town called Ayr, near the old Caledonian Forest, and where we had hot wars with the insurgent Scots. Well, sir, it happened, as in similar cases, that Thirlwall, though a bold and active soldier, was surprised in the Castle of Douglas, about Hallowmass, by this same worthy, young James Douglas. In no very good humour was he, as you may suppose ; for his father, called William the Hardy, or William Longlegs, having refused, on any terms, to be-

come Anglocised, was made a lawful prisoner, and died as such, closely confined in Berwick, or, as some say, in Newcastle. The news of his father's death had put young Douglas into no small rage, and tended, I think, to suggest what he did in his resentment. Being embarrassed the quantity of provisions which he found in castle, which, the English being superior in country, he had neither the means to remove, the leisure to stay and consume, the fiend, I think, inspired him with a contrivance to render them unfit for human use. You shall judge yourself whether it was likely to be suggested by a good or an evil spirit. According to this device, the gold, silver, and transportable commodities being carried to places of safety, Douglas caused the meat, and other corn or grain to be brought to the castle cellar, where he emptied the contents of the sacks into one loathsome heap, and pulled out the heads of the barrels and punctured them as to let the mingled drink run through of meal, grain, and so forth. The bullocks and other animals which were intended for slaughter were in like manner

knocked on the head, and their blood suffered to drain forth into the mass of edible substances; and lastly, the flesh of these oxen was buried in the same mass, in which was also included the dead bodies of those in the castle, who, receiving no quarter from the Douglas, paid dear enough for having kept no better watch. This base and unworthy abuse of provisions intended for the use of man, together with throwing into the well of the castle carcasses of men and horses, and other filth for polluting the same, has since that time been called the DOUGLAS LARDER."

"I pretend not, good Sir Aymer," said the minstrel, "to vindicate what you justly reprove, nor can I conceive any mode of rendering provisions arranged after the form of the Douglas Larder, proper for the use of any Christian; yet this young gentleman might perhaps act under the sting of natural resentment, rendering his singular exploit more excusable than it may seem at first. Think, if your own noble father had just died in a lingering captivity, his inheritance seized upon, and occupied as a garrison by a foreign enemy, would not these things stir you

to a mode of resentment, which in cold blood, and judging of it as the action of an enemy, your honour might hold in natural and laudable abhorrence?—Would you pay respect to dead and senseless objects, which no one could blame your appropriating to your own use, or even scruple the refusal of quarter to prisoners, which is so often practised even in wars which are otherwise termed fair and humane?”

“You press me close, minstrel,” said Aymer de Valence. “I at least have no great interest to excuse the Douglas in this matter, since its consequences were, that I myself, and the rest of my uncle’s host, laboured with Clifford and his army to rebuild this same Dangerous Castle; and feeling no stomach for the cheer that the Douglas had left us, we suffered hard commons, though I acknowledge we did not hesitate to adopt for our own use such sheep and oxen as the miserable Scots had still left around their farm-houses; and I jest not, Sir Minstrel, when I acknowledge in sad earnest, that we martial men ought to make our petitions with peculiar penitence to Heaven for mercy, when we reflect on

the various miseries which the nature of our profession compels us to inflict upon each other."

"It seems to me," answered the minstrel, "that those who feel the stings of their own conscience should be more lenient when they speak of the offences of others; nor do I greatly rely on a sort of prophecy which was delivered, as the men of this hill district say, to the young Lord Douglas, by a man who in the course of nature should have been long since dead, promising him a course of success against the English for having sacrificed his own Castle of Douglas to prevent their making it a garrison."

"We have time enough for the story," said Sir Aymer, "and methinks it would suit a knight and a minstrel better than the grave converse we have hitherto held, which would have beseemed—so God save me—the mouths of two travelling friars."

"So be it," said the minstrel; "the rote or the viol easily changes its time and varies its note."

CHAPTER V.

A tale of sorrow, for your eyes may weep ;
A tale of horror, for your flesh may tingle ;
A tale of wonder, for the eyebrows arch,
And the flesh curdles, if you read it rightly.

Old Play.

“ YOUR honour must be informed, gentle Sir Aymer de Valence, that I have heard this story told at a great distance from the land in which it happened, by a sworn minstrel, the ancient friend and servant of the house of Douglas, one of the best, it is said, who ever belonged to that noble family. This minstrel, Hugo Hugonet by name, attended his young master when on this fierce exploit, as was his wont.

“ The castle was in total tumult ; in one corner the war-men were busy breaking up and destroying provisions ; in another, they were slaying men, horses, and cattle, and these actions were

accompanied with appropriate sounds. The cattle, particularly, had become sensible of their impending fate, and with awkward resistance and piteous cries, testified that reluctance with which these poor creatures look instinctively on the shambles. The groans and screams of men, undergoing, or about to undergo, the stroke of death, and the screeches of the poor horses which were in mortal agony, formed a fearful chorus. Hugonet was desirous to remove himself from such unpleasant sights and sounds; but his master, the Douglas, had been a man of some reading, and his old servant was anxious to secure a book of poetry, to which he had been attached of old. This contained the Lays of an ancient Scottish Bard, who, if an ordinary human creature while he was in this life, cannot now perhaps be exactly termed such.

“He was, in short, that Thomas, distinguished by the name of the Rhymer, and whose intimacy, it is said, became so great with the gifted people, called the Faëry folk, that he could, like them, foretell the future deed before it came to pass,



and united in his own person the quality of bard and of soothsayer. But of late years he had vanished almost entirely from this mortal scene ; and although the time and manner of his death were never publicly known, yet the general belief was, that he was not severed from the land of the living, but removed to the land of Faëry, from whence he sometimes made excursions, and concerned himself only about matters which were to come hereafter. Hugonet was the more earnest to prevent the loss of the works of this ancient bard, as many of his poems and predictions were said to be preserved in the castle, and were supposed to contain much especially connected with the old house of Douglas, as well as other families of ancient descent, who had been subjects of this old man's prophecy ; and accordingly he determined to save this volume from destruction in the general conflagration to which the building was about to be consigned by the heir of its ancient proprietors. With this view he hurried up into the little old vaulted room, called ' the Douglas's study,' in which there might be some dozen old books written by the ancient

chaplains, in what the minstrels call *the letter black*. He immediately discovered the celebrated lay, called Sir Tristrem, which has been so often altered and abridged as to bear little resemblance to the original. Hugonet, who well knew the value in which this poem was held by the ancient lords of the castle, took the parchment volume from the shelves of the library, and laid it upon a small desk adjacent to the Baron's chair. Having made such preparation for putting it in safety, he fell into a brief reverie, in which the decay of light, and the preparations for the Douglas Larder, but especially the last sight of objects which had been familiar to his eyes, now on the eve of destruction, engaged him at that moment.

“ The bard, therefore, was thinking within himself upon the uncommon mixture of the mystical scholar and warrior in his old master, when, as he bent his eyes upon the book of the ancient Rhymer, he was astonished to observe it slowly removed from the desk on which it lay by an invisible hand. The old man looked with horror at the spontaneous motion of the book, for

the safety of which he was interested, and had the courage to approach a little nearer the table, in order to discover by what means it had been withdrawn.

“ I have said the room was already becoming dark, so as to render it difficult to distinguish any person in the chair, though it now appeared, on closer examination, that a kind of shadowy outline of a human form was seated in it, but neither precise enough to convey its exact figure to the mind, nor so detailed as to intimate distinctly its mode of action. The Bard of Douglas, therefore, gazed upon the object of his fear, as if he had looked upon something not mortal; nevertheless, as he gazed more intently, he became more capable of discovering the object which offered itself to his eyes, and they grew by degrees more keen to penetrate what they witnessed. A tall thin form, attired in, or rather shaded with, a long flowing dusky robe, having a face and physiognomy so wild and overgrown with hair as to be hardly human, were the only marked outlines of the phantom; and, looking more attentively, Hugonet was still sen-

sible of two other forms, the outlines, it seemed, of a hart and a hind, which appeared half to shelter themselves behind the person and under the robe of this supernatural figure."

"A probable tale," said the knight, "for you, Sir Minstrel, a man of sense as you seem to be, to recite so gravely! From what wise authority have you had this tale, which, though it might pass well enough amid clanging beakers, must be held quite apocryphal in the sober hours of the morning?"

"By my minstrel word, Sir Knight," answered Bertram, "I am no propagator of the fable, if it be one; Hugonet, the violer, when he had retired into a cloister near the Lake of Pembelmeré in Wales, communicated the story to me as I now tell it. Therefore, as it was upon the authority of an eyewitness, I apologize not for relating it to you, since I could hardly discover a more direct source of knowledge."

"Be it so, Sir Minstrel," said the knight; "tell on thy tale, and may thy legend escape criticism from others as well as from me."

“ Hugonet, Sir Knight,” answered Bertram, “ was a holy man, and maintained a fair character during his whole life, notwithstanding his trade may be esteemed a light one. The vision spoke to him in an antique language, like that formerly used in the kingdom of Strath-Clyde, being a species of Scots or Gaelic, which few would have comprehended.”

“ ‘ You are a learned man,’ said the apparition, ‘ and not unacquainted with the dialects used in your country formerly, although they are now out of date, and you are obliged to translate them into the vulgar Saxon of Deira or Northumberland; but highly must an ancient British bard prize one in this “ remote term of time,” who sets upon the poetry of his native country a value which invites him to think of its preservation at a moment of such terror as influences the present evening.’

“ ‘ It is, indeed,’ said Hugonet, ‘ a night of terror, that calls even the dead from the grave, and makes them the ghastly and fearful companions of the living—Who or what art thou, in God’s name, who breakest the bounds which divide

them, and revisitest thus strangely the state thou hast so long bid adieu to?

“ ‘ I am,’ replied the vision, ‘ that celebrated Thomas the Rhymer, by some called Thomas of Erceldoun, or Thomas the True Speaker. Like other sages, I am permitted at times to revisit the scenes of my former life, nor am I incapable of removing the shadowy clouds and darkness which overhang futurity; and know, thou afflicted man, that what thou now seest in this woful country, is not a general emblem of what shall therein befall hereafter, but in proportion as the Douglasses are now suffering the loss and destruction of their home, for their loyalty to the rightful heir of the Scottish kingdom, so hath Heaven appointed for them a just reward; and as they have not spared to burn and destroy their own house and that of their fathers in the Bruce’s cause, so is it the doom of Heaven, that as often as the walls of Douglas Castle shall be burnt to the ground, they shall be again rebuilt still more stately and more magnificent than before.’

“ A cry was now heard like that of a multitude

in the court-yard, joining in a fierce shout of exultation; at the same time a broad and ruddy glow seemed to burst from the beams and rafters, and sparks flew from them as from the smith's stithy, while the element caught to its fuel, and the conflagration broke its way through every aperture.

“ ‘ See ye that,’ said the vision, casting his eye towards the windows, and disappearing— ‘ Begone ! The fated hour of removing this book is not yet come, nor are thine the destined hands. But it will be safe where I have placed it, and the time of its removal shall come.’ The voice was heard after the form had vanished, and the brain of Hugonet almost turned round at the wild scene which he beheld; his utmost exertion was scarcely sufficient to withdraw him from the terrible spot, and Douglas Castle that night sunk into ashes and smoke, to arise, in no great length of time, in a form stronger than ever.” The minstrel stopt, and his hearer, the English knight, remained silent for some minutes, ere at length he replied.

“ It is true, minstrel,” answered Sir Aymer,

“ that your tale is so far undeniable, that this castle—three times burned down by the heir of the house and of the barony—has hitherto been as often reared again by Henry Lord Clifford, and other generals of the English, who endeavoured on every occasion to build it up more artificially and more strongly than it had formerly existed, since it occupies a position too important to the safety of our Scottish border to permit our yielding it up. This I myself have partly witnessed. But I cannot think, that because the castle has been so destroyed, it is therefore decreed so to be repaired in future, considering that such cruelties, as surely cannot meet the approbation of Heaven, have attended the feats of the Douglasses. But I see thou art determined to keep thine own faith, nor can I blame thee, since the wonderful turns of fate which have attended this fortress, are sufficient to warrant any one to watch for what seem the peculiar indications of the will of Heaven; but thou mayst believe, good minstrel, that the fault shall not be mine, if the young Douglas shall have opportunity to exercise his cookery upon a

second edition of his family larder, or to profit by the predictions of Thomas the Rhymer."

"I do not doubt due circumspection upon your own part and Sir John de Walton's," said Bertram: "but there is no crime in my saying that Heaven can accomplish its own purposes. I look upon Douglas Castle as in some degree a fated place, and I long to see what changes time may have made in it during the currency of twenty years. Above all, I desire to secure, if possible, the volume of this Thomas of Erceldoun, having in it such a fund of forgotten minstrelsy, and of prophecies respecting the future fates of the British kingdom, both northern and southern."

The knight made no answer, but rode a little space forward, keeping the upper part of the ridge of the water, by which the road down the vale seemed to be rather sharply conducted. It at length attained the summit of an acclivity of considerable length. From this point, and behind a conspicuous rock, which appeared to have been pushed aside, as it were, like the scene of a theatre, to admit a view of the under part of

the valley, the travellers beheld the extensive vale, parts of which have been already shown in detail, but which, as the river became narrower, was now entirely laid bare in its height and depth as far as it extended, and displayed in its precincts, at a little distance from the course of the stream, the towering and lordly castle to which it gave the name. The mist which continued to encumber the valley with its fleecy clouds, showed imperfectly the rude fortifications which served to defend the small town of Douglas, which was strong enough to repel a desultory attack, but not to withstand what was called in those days a formal siege. The most striking feature was its church, an ancient Gothic pile raised on an eminence in the centre of the town, and even then extremely ruinous. To the left, and lying in the distance, might be seen other towers and battlements; and, divided from the town by a piece of artificial water, which extended almost around it, arose the Dangerous Castle of Douglas.

Sternly was it fortified, after the fashion of

the middle ages, with donjon and battlements ; displaying, above others, the tall tower, which bore the name of Lord Henry's, or the Clifford's Tower.

“ Yonder is the castle,” said Aymer de Valence, extending his arm, with a smile of triumph upon his brow ; “ thou mayst judge thyself, whether the defences added to it under the Clifford are likely to render its next capture a more easy deed than the last.”

The minstrel barely shook his head, and quoted from the Psalmist—“ *Nisi Dominus custodiet.*” Nor did he prosecute the discourse, though De Valence answered eagerly, “ My own edition of the text is not very different from thine ; but, methinks, thou art more spiritually minded than can always be predicated of a wandering minstrel.”

“ God knows,” said Bertram, “ that if I, or such as I, are forgetful of the finger of Providence in accomplishing its purposes in this lower world, we have heavier blame than that of other people, since we are perpetually called upon, in

the exercise of our fanciful profession, to admire the turns of fate which bring good out of evil, and which render those who think only of their own passions and purposes the executors of the will of Heaven."

"I do submit to what you say, Sir Minstrel," answered the knight, "and it would be unlawful to express any doubt of the truths which you speak so solemnly, any more than of your own belief in them. Let me add, sir, that I think I have power enough in this garrison to bid you welcome, and Sir John de Walton, I hope, will not refuse free access to hall, castle, or knight's bower, to a person of your profession, and by whose conversation we shall, perhaps, profit somewhat. I cannot, however, lead you to expect such indulgence for your son, considering the present state of his health; but if I procure him the privilege to remain at the convent of Saint Bride, he will be there unmolested and in safety, until you have renewed your acquaintance with Douglas Dale and its history, and are disposed to set forward on your journey."

“ I embrace your honour’s proposal the more willingly,” said the minstrel, “ that I can recompense the Father Abbot.”

“ A main point with holy men or women,” replied De Valence, “ who, in time of warfare, subsist by affording the visitors of their shrine the means of maintenance in their cloisters for a passing season.”

The party now approached the sentinels on guard at the castle, who were closely and thickly stationed, and who respectfully admitted Sir Aymer de Valence, as next in command under Sir John de Walton. Fabian—for so was the young squire named who attended on De Valence—mentioned it as his master’s pleasure that the minstrel should also be admitted.

An old archer, however, looked hard at the minstrel as he followed Sir Aymer. “ It is not for us,” said he, “ or any of our degree, to oppose the pleasure of Sir Aymer de Valence, uncle or nephew to the Earl of Pembroke, in such a matter; and for us, Master Fabian, welcome are you to make the gleeman your companion both at bed and board, as well as your visitant, a week

or two at the Castle of Douglas ; but your worship is well aware of the strict order of watch laid upon us, and if Solomon, King of Israel, were to come here as a travelling minstrel, by my faith I durst not give him entrance, unless I had positive authority from Sir John de Walton.”

“ Do you doubt, sirrah,” said Sir Aymer de Valence, who returned on hearing an altercation betwixt Fabian and the archer—“ do you doubt that I have good authority to entertain a guest, or do you presume to contest it ?”

“ Heaven forbid !” said the old man, “ that I should presume to place my own desire in opposition to your worship, who has so lately and so honourably acquired your spurs ; but in this matter I must think what will be the wish of Sir John de Walton, who is your governor, Sir Knight, as well as mine ; and so far I hold it worth while to detain your guest until Sir John return from a ride to the outposts of the castle ; and this, I conceive, being my duty, will be no matter of offence to your worship.”

“ Methinks,” said the knight, “ it is saucy in

thee to suppose that my commands can have any thing in them improper, or contradictory to those of Sir John de Walton ; thou mayst trust to me at least that thou shalt come to no harm. Keep this man in the guard-room ; let him not want good cheer, and when Sir John de Walton returns, report him as a person admitted by my invitation, and if any thing more be wanted to make out your excuse, I shall not be reluctant in stating it to the governor."

The archer made a signal of obedience with the pike which he held in his hand, and resumed the grave and solemn manner of a sentinel upon his post. He first, however, ushered in the minstrel, and furnished him with food and liquor, speaking at the same time to Fabian, who remained behind. The smart young stripling had become very proud of late, in consequence of obtaining the name of Sir Aymer's squire, and advancing a step in chivalry, as Sir Aymer himself had, somewhat earlier than the usual period, been advanced from squire to knight.

" I tell thee, Fabian," said the old archer, (whose gravity, sagacity, and skill in his voca-

tion, while they gained him the confidence of all in the castle, subjected him, as he himself said, occasionally to the ridicule of the young coxcombs ; and at the same time, we may add, rendered him somewhat pragmatic and punctilious towards those who stood higher than himself in birth and rank ;) “ I tell thee, Fabian, thou wilt do thy master, Sir Aymer, good service, if thou wilt give him a hint to suffer an old archer, man-at-arms, or such like, to give him a fair and civil answer respecting that which he commands ; for undoubtedly it is not in the first score of a man’s years that he learns the various proper forms of military service ; and Sir John de Walton, a most excellent commander no doubt, is one earnestly bent on pursuing the strict line of his duty, and will be rigorously severe, as well, believe me, with thy master as with a lesser person. Nay, he also possesses that zeal for his duty which induces him to throw blame, if there be the slightest ground for it, upon Aymer de Valence himself, although his uncle, the Earl of Pembroke, was Sir John de Walton’s steady patron, and laid the beginning of his good fortune ; for all which,

by training up his nephew in the true discipline of the French wars, Sir John has taken the best way of shewing himself grateful to the old Earl."

"Be it as you will, old Gilbert Greenleaf," answered Fabian, "thou knowest I never quarrel with thy sermonizing, and therefore give me credit for submitting to many a lecture from Sir John de Walton and thyself; but thou drivest this a little too far, if thou canst not let a day pass without giving me a flogging. Credit me, Sir John de Walton will not thank thee, if thou term him one too old to remember that he himself had once some green sap in his veins. Ay, thus it is, the old man will not forget that he has once been young, nor the young that he must some day be old; and so the one changes his manners into the lingering formality of advanced age, and the other remains like a midsummer torrent swollen with rain, every drop of water in it noise, froth, and overflow. There is a maxim for thee, Gilbert!—Heardest thou ever better? hang it up amidst thy axioms of wisdom, and see if it will not pass among them like fifteen to the dozen. It will serve to bring thee off, man,

when the wine-pot (thine only fault, good Gilbert) hath brought thee on occasion into something of a scrape."

"Best keep it for thyself, good Sir Squire," said the old man; "methinks it is more like to stand thyself one day in good stead. Who ever heard of a knight, or of the wood of which a knight is made, and that is a squire, being punished corporally like a poor old archer or horse-boy? Your worst fault will be mended by some of these witty sayings, and your best service will scarce be rewarded more thankfully than by giving thee the name of Fabian the Fabler, or some such witty title."

Having unloosed his repartee to this extent, old Greenleaf resumed a certain acidity of countenance, which may be said to characterise those whose preferment hath become frozen under the influence of the slowness of its progress, and who display a general spleen against such as have obtained the advancement for which all are struggling, earlier, and, as they suppose, with less merit than their own. From time to time the eye of the old sentinel stole from the top of his

pike, and with an air of triumph rested upon the young man Fabian, as if to see how deeply the wound had galled him, while at the same time he held himself on the alert to perform whatever mechanical duty his post might require. Both Fabian and his master were at the happy period of life when such discontent as that of the grave archer affected them lightly, and, at the very worst, was considered as the jest of an old man and a good soldier; the more especially, as he was always willing to do the duty of his companions, and was much trusted by Sir John de Walton, who, though very much younger, had been bred up like Greenleaf in the wars of Edward the First, and was tenacious in upholding strict discipline, which, since the death of that great monarch, had been considerably neglected by the young and warm-blooded valour of England.

Meantime it occurred to Sir Aymer de Valence, that though in displaying the usual degree of hospitality shown to such a man as Bertram, he had merely done what was becoming his own rank, as one possessed of the highest

honours of chivalry—the self-styled minstrel might not in reality be a man of that worth which he assumed. There was certainly something in his conversation, at least more grave, if not more austere, than was common to those of his calling; and when he recollected many points of Sir John de Walton's minuteness, a doubt arose in his mind, that the governor might not approve of his having introduced into the castle a person of Bertram's character, who was capable of making observations from which the garrison might afterwards feel much danger and inconvenience. Secretly, therefore, he regretted that he had not fairly intimated to the wandering minstrel, that his reception, or that of any stranger, within the Dangerous Castle, was not at present permitted by the circumstances of the times. In this case, the express line of his duty would have been his vindication, and instead, perhaps, of discountenance and blame, he would have had praise and honour from his superior.

With these thoughts passing through his mind, some tacit apprehension arose of a rebuke on the

part of his commanding-officer ; for this officer, notwithstanding his strictness, Sir Aymer loved as well as feared. He went, therefore, towards the guard-room of the castle, under the pretence of seeing that the rights of hospitality had been duly observed towards his late travelling companion. The minstrel arose respectfully, and from the manner in which he paid his compliments, seemed, if he had not expected this call of enquiry, at least to be in no degree surprised at it. Sir Aymer, on the other hand, assumed an air something more distant than he had yet used towards Bertram, and in reverting to his former invitation, he now so far qualified it as to say, that the minstrel knew that he was only second in command, and that effectual permission to enter the castle ought to be sanctioned by Sir John de Walton.

There is a civil way of seeming to believe any apology which people are disposed to receive in payment, without alleging suspicion of its currency. The minstrel, therefore, tendered his thanks for the civility which had so far been shown to him. “ It was a mere wish of pass-

ing curiosity," he said, " which, if not granted, could be attended with no consequences either inconvenient or disagreeable to him. Thomas of Ercildoun was, according to the Welsh triads, *one of the three bards of Britain*, who never stained a spear with blood, or was guilty either of taking or retaking castles and fortresses; and thus far not a person likely, after death, to be suspected of such warlike feats. But I can easily conceive why Sir John de Walton should have allowed the usual rights of hospitality to fall into disuse, and why a man of public character like myself ought not to desire food or lodging where it is accounted so dangerous; and it can surprise no one why the governor did not even invest his worthy young lieutenant with the power of dispensing with so strict and unusual a rule."

These words, very coolly spoken, had something of the effect of affronting the young knight; as insinuating, that he was not held sufficiently trustworthy by Sir John de Walton, with whom he had lived on terms of affection and familiarity, though the governor had attained his thirtieth

year and upwards, and his lieutenant did not yet write himself one-and-twenty, the full age of chivalry having been in his case particularly dispensed with, owing to a feat of early manhood. Ere he had fully composed the angry thoughts which were chafing in his mind, the sound of a hunting-bugle was heard at the gate, and from the sort of general stir which it spread through the garrison, it was plain that the governor had returned from his ride. Every sentinel, seemingly animated by his presence, shouldered his pike more uprightly, gave the word of the post more sharply, and seemed more fully awake and conscious of his duty. Sir John de Walton having alighted from his horse, asked Greenleaf what had passed during his absence; the old archer thought it his duty to say, that a minstrel, who seemed like a Scotchman, or wandering borderer, had been admitted into the castle, while his son, a lad sick of the pestilence so much talked of, had been left for a time at the Abbey of Saint Bride. This he said on Fabian's information. The archer added, that the father was a man of tale and song, who could keep the

whole garrison amused, without giving them leave to attend to their own business.

“ We want no such devices to pass the time,” answered the governor; “ and we would have been better satisfied if our lieutenant had been pleased to find us other guests, and fitter for a direct and frank communication, than one who, by his profession, is a detractor of God and a deceiver of man.”

“ Yet,” said the old soldier, who could hardly listen even to his commander without indulging the humour of contradiction, “ I have heard your honour intimate that the trade of a minstrel, when it is justly acted up to, is as worthy as even the degree of knighthood itself.”

“ Such it may have been in former days,” answered the knight; “ but in modern minstrelsy, the duty of rendering the art an incentive to virtue is forgotten, and it is well if the poetry which fired our fathers to noble deeds, does not now push on their children to such as are base and unworthy. But I will speak upon this to my friend Aymer, than whom I do not

know a more excellent, or a more high-spirited young man."

While discoursing with the archer in this manner, Sir John de Walton, of a tall and handsome figure, advanced and stood within the ample arch of the guard-room chimney, and was listened to in reverential silence by trusty Gilbert, who filled up with nods and signs, as an attentive auditor, the pauses in the conversation. The conduct of another hearer of what passed was not equally respectful, but, from his position, he escaped observation.

This third person was no other than the squire Fabian, who was concealed from observation by his position behind the hob, or projecting portion of the old-fashioned fireplace, and hid himself yet more carefully when he heard the conversation between the governor and the archer turn to the prejudice, as he thought, of his master. The squire's employment at this time, was the servile task of cleaning Sir Aymer's arms, which was conveniently performed by heating, upon the projection already specified, the pieces of steel armour for the usual thin coating of varnish. He

could not, therefore, if he should be discovered, be considered as guilty of any thing insolent or disrespectful. He was better screened from view, as a thick smoke arose from a quantity of oak panelling, carved in many cases with the crest and achievements of the Douglas family, which being the fuel nearest at hand, lay smouldering in the chimney, and gathering to a blaze.

The governor, unconscious of this addition to his audience, pursued his conversation with Gilbert Greenleaf: "I need not tell you," he said, "that I am interested in the speedy termination of this siege or blockade, with which Douglas continues to threaten us; my own honour and affections are engaged in keeping this Dangerous Castle safe in England's behalf, but I am troubled at the admission of this stranger; and young De Valence would have acted more strictly in the line of his duty, if he had refused to this wanderer any communication with this garrison without my permission."

"Pity it is," replied old Greenleaf, shaking his head, "that this good-natured and gallant young knight is somewhat drawn aside by the

rash advices of his squire, the boy Fabian, who has bravery, but as little steadiness in him as a bottle of fermented small beer."

"Now hang thee," thought Fabian to himself, "for an old relic of the wars, stuffed full of conceit and warlike terms, like the soldier who, to keep himself from the cold, has lapped himself so close in a tattered ensign for a shelter, that his very outside may show nothing but rags and blazonry."

"I would not think twice of the matter, were the party less dear to me," said Sir John de Walton. "But I would fain be of use to this young man, even although I should purchase his improvement in military knowledge at the expense of giving him a little pain. Experience should, as it were, be burnt in upon the mind of a young man, and not merely impressed by marking the lines of his chart out for him with chalk; I will remember the hint you, Greenleaf, have given, and take an opportunity of severing these two young men; and though I most dearly love the one, and am far from wishing ill to the other, yet at present, as you well hint, the blind is leading

the blind, and the young knight has for his assistant and counsellor too young a squire, and that must be amended."

"Marry! out upon thee, old palmer worm!" said the page within himself; "have I found thee in the very fact of maligning myself and my master, as it is thy nature to do towards all the hopeful young buds of chivalry? If it were not to dirty the arms of an *élève* of chivalry, by measuring them with one of thy rank, I might honour thee with a knightly invitation to the field, while the scandal which thou hast spoken is still foul upon thy tongue; as it is, thou shalt not carry one kind of language publicly in the castle, and another before the governor, upon the footing of having served with him under the banner of Longshanks. I will carry to my master this tale of thine evil intentions; and when we have concerted together, it shall appear whether the youthful spirits of the garrison or the grey beards are most likely to be the hope and protection of this same Castle of Douglas."

It is enough to say that Fabian pursued his purpose, in carrying to his master, and in no

very good humour, the report of what had passed between Sir John de Walton and the old soldier. He succeeded in representing the whole as a formal offence intended to Sir Aymer de Valence; while all that the governor did to remove the suspicions entertained by the young knight, could not in any respect bring him to take a kindly view of the feelings of his commander towards him. He retained the impression which he had formed from Fabian's recital of what he had heard, and did not think he was doing Sir John de Walton any injustice, in supposing him desirous to engross the greatest share of the fame acquired in the defence of the castle, and thrusting back his companions, who might reasonably pretend to a fair portion of it.

The mother of mischief, says a Scottish proverb, is no bigger than a midge's wing.* In this matter of quarrel, neither the young man nor the older knight had afforded each other any just cause of offence. De Walton was a strict observer of military discipline, in which he had been

* *i. e.* Gnat's wing.

educated from his extreme youth, and by which he was almost as completely ruled as by his natural disposition; and his present situation added force to his original education.

Common report had even exaggerated the military skill, the love of adventure, and the great variety of enterprise, ascribed to James, the young Lord Douglas. He had, in the eyes of this Southern garrison, the faculties of a fiend, rather than those of a mere mortal; for if the English soldiers cursed the tedium of the perpetual watch and ward upon the Dangerous Castle, which admitted of no relaxation from the severity of extreme duty, they agreed that a tall form was sure to appear to them with a battle-axe in his hand, and entering into conversation in the most insinuating manner, never failed, with an ingenuity and eloquence equal to that of a fallen spirit, to recommend to the discontented sentinel some mode in which, by giving his assistance to betray the English, he might set himself at liberty. The variety of these devices, and the frequency of their recurrence, kept Sir John de Walton's anxiety so perpetually

upon the stretch, that he at no time thought himself exactly out of the Black Douglas's reach, any more than the good Christian supposes himself out of reach of the wiles of the Devil; while every new temptation, instead of confirming his hope, seems to announce that the immediate retreat of the Evil One will be followed by some new attack yet more cunningly devised. Under this general state of anxiety and apprehension, the temper of the governor changed somewhat for the worse, and they who loved him best, regretted most that he became addicted to complain of the want of diligence on the part of those, who, neither invested with responsibility like his, nor animated by the hope of such splendid rewards, did not entertain the same degree of watchful and incessant suspicion as himself. The soldiers muttered that the vigilance of their governor was marked with severity; the officers and men of rank, of whom there were several, as the castle was a renowned school of arms, and there was a certain merit attained even by serving within its walls, complained, at the same time, that Sir John de

Walton no longer made parties for hunting, for hawking, or for any purpose which might soften the rigours of warfare, and suffered nothing to go forward but the precise discipline of the castle. On the other hand, it may be usually granted, that the castle is well kept where the governor is a disciplinarian; and where feuds and personal quarrels are found in the garrison, the young men are usually more in fault than those whose greater experience has convinced them of the necessity of using the strictest precautions.

A generous mind—and such was Sir John de Walton's—is often in this way changed and corrupted by the habit of over-vigilance, and pushed beyond its natural limits of candour. Neither was Sir Aymer de Valence free from a similar change; suspicion, though from a different cause, seemed also to threaten to bias his open and noble disposition, in those qualities which had hitherto been proper to him. It was in vain that Sir John de Walton studiously sought opportunities to give his younger friend indulgences, which at times were as far extended as the duty of the garrison permitted. The blow

was struck; the alarm had been given to a proud and fiery temper on both sides; and while De Valence entertained an opinion that he was unjustly suspected by a friend, who was in several respects bound to him, De Walton, on the other hand, was led to conceive that a young man, of whom he took a charge as affectionate as if he had been a son of his own, and who owed to his lessons what he knew of warfare, and what success he had obtained in life, had taken offence at trifles, and considered himself ill treated on very inadequate grounds. The seeds of disagreement, thus sown between them, failed not, like the tares sown by the Enemy among the wheat, to pass from one class of the garrison to another; the soldiers, though without any better reason than merely to pass the time, took different sides between their governor and his young lieutenant; and so the ball of contention being once thrown up between them, never lacked some arm or other to keep it in motion.

CHAPTER VI.

Alas! they had been friends in youth ;
 But whispering tongues can poison truth ;
 And constancy lives in realms above ;
 And life is thorny, and youth is vain ;
 And to be wroth with one we love,
 Doth work like madness in the brain.

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Each spoke words of high disdain,
 And insult to his heart's dear brother,
 But never either found another
 To free the hollow heart from paining—
 They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
 Like cliffs which had been rent asunder ;
 A dreary sea now flows between,
 But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,
 Shall wholly do away, I ween,
 The marks of that which once hath been.

Christabelle of COLERIDGE.

IN prosecution of the intention which, when his blood was cool, seemed to him wisest, Sir John de Walton resolved that he would go to the verge of indulgence with his lieutenant and his young officers, furnish them with every species

of amusement which the place rendered possible, and make them ashamed of their discontent, by overloading them with courtesy. The first time, therefore, that he saw Aymer de Valence after his return to the castle, he addressed him in high spirits, whether real or assumed.

“What thinkest thou, my young friend,” said De Walton, “if we try some of the woodland sports proper, they say, to this country? There are still in our neighbourhood some herds of the Caledonian breed of wild cattle, which are nowhere to be found except among the moorlands—the black and rugged frontier of what was anciently called the Kingdom of Strath-Clyde. There are some hunters, too, who have been accustomed to the sport, and who vouch that these animals are by far the most bold and fierce subject of chase in the island of Britain.”

“You will do as you please,” replied Sir Aymer, coldly; “but it is not I, Sir John, who would recommend, for the sake of a hunting-match, that you should involve the whole garrison in danger; you know best the responsibilities incurred by your office here, and no doubt

must have heedfully attended to them before making a proposal of such a nature."

"I do indeed know my own duty," replied De Walton, offended in turn, "and might be allowed to think of yours also, without assuming more than my own share of responsibility; but it seems to me as if the commander of this Dangerous Castle, among other inabilities, were, as old people in this country say, subjected to a spell—and one which renders it impossible for him to guide his conduct so as to afford pleasure to those whom he is most desirous to oblige. Not a great many weeks since, whose eyes would have sparkled like those of Sir Aymer de Valence at the proposal of a general hunting-match after a new object of game; and now what is his bearing when such sport is proposed, merely, I think, to disappoint my purpose of obliging him?—a cold acquiescence drops half frozen from his lips, and he proposes to go to rouse the wild cattle with an air of gravity, as if he were undertaking a pilgrimage to the tomb of a martyr."

"Not so, Sir John," answered the young knight. "In our present situation we stand con-

joined in more charges than one, and although the greater and controlling trust is no doubt laid upon you as the elder and abler knight, yet still I feel that I myself have my own share of a serious responsibility. I trust, therefore, you will indulgently hear my opinion, and bear with it, even though it should appear to have relation to that part of our common charge which is more especially intrusted to your keeping. The dignity of knighthood which I have the honour to share with you, the *accolade* laid on my shoulder by the royal Plantagenet, entitles me, methinks, to so much grace."

"I cry you mercy," said the elder cavalier; "I forgot how important a person I had before me, dubbed by King Edward himself, who was moved no doubt by special reasons to confer such an early honour; and I certainly feel that I overstep my duty when I propose any thing that savours like idle sport to a person of such grave pretensions."

"Sir John de Walton," retorted De Valence, "we have had something too much of this—let it stop here. All that I mean to say is, that in this

wardship of Douglas Castle, it will not be by my consent, if any amusement, which distinctly infers a relaxation of discipline, be unnecessarily engaged in, and especially such as compels us to summon to our assistance a number of the Scots, whose evil disposition towards us we well know ; nor will I, though my years have rendered me liable to such suspicion, suffer any thing of this kind to be imputed to me ; and if unfortunately—though I am sure I know not why—we are in future to lay aside those bonds of familiar friendship which formerly linked us to each other, yet I see no reason why we should not bear ourselves in our necessary communications like knights and gentlemen, and put the best construction on each other's motives, since there can be no reason for imputing the worst to any thing that comes from either of us."

" You may be right, Sir Aymer de Valence," said the governor, bending stiffly ; " and since you say we are no longer bound to each other as friends, you may be certain, nevertheless, that I will never permit a hostile feeling, of which you are the object, to occupy my bosom. You have

been long, and I hope not uselessly, my pupil in the duties of chivalry. You are the near relation of the Earl of Pembroke, my kind and constant patron, and if these circumstances are well weighed, they form a connexion which it would be difficult, at least for me, to break through. If you feel yourself, as you seem to intimate, less strictly tied by former obligations, you must take your own choice in fixing our relations towards each other."

"I can only say," replied De Valence, "that my conduct will naturally be regulated by your own; and you, Sir John, cannot hope more devoutly than I do, that our military duties may be fairly discharged, without interfering with our friendly intercourse."

The knights here parted, after a conference which once or twice had very nearly terminated in a full and cordial explanation; but still there was wanting one kind heartfelt word from either, to break, as it were, the ice which was fast freezing upon their intercourse, and neither chose to be the first in making the necessary advances with sufficient cordiality, though each would

have gladly done so, had the other appeared desirous of meeting it with the same ardour ; but their pride was too high, and prevented either from saying what might at once have put them upon an open and manly footing. They parted, therefore, without again returning to the subject of the proposed diversion ; until it was afterwards resumed in a formal note, praying Sir Aymer de Valence to accompany the commandant of Douglas Castle upon a solemn hunting-match, which had for its object the wild cattle of the neighbouring dale.

The time of meeting was appointed at six in the morning, beyond the gate of the outer barricade ; and the chase was declared to be ended in the afternoon, when the *reheat* should be blown beneath the great oak, known by the name of Sholto's Club, which stood a remarkable object, where Douglas Dale was bounded by several scattered trees, the outskirts of the forest and hill country. The usual warning was sent out to the common people, or vassals of the district, which they, notwithstanding their feeling of antipathy, received in general with delight, upon the great

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Epicurean principle of *carpe diem*, that is to say, in whatever circumstances it happens to present itself, be sure you lose no recreation which life affords. A hunting-match has still its attractions, even though an English knight take his pleasure in the woods of the Douglas.

It was no doubt afflicting to these faithful vassals, to acknowledge another lord than the redoubted Douglas, and to wait by wood and river at the command of English officers, and in the company of their archers, whom they accounted their natural enemies. Still it was the only species of amusement which had been permitted them for a long time, and they were not disposed to omit the rare opportunity of joining in it. The chase of the wolf, the wild boar, or even the timid stag, required silvan arms; the wild cattle still more demanded this equipment of war-bows and shafts, boar-spears and sharp swords, and other tools of the chase similar to those used in actual war. Considering this, the Scottish inhabitants were seldom allowed to join in the chase, except under regulation as to number and arms, and especially in preserving a balance of force









