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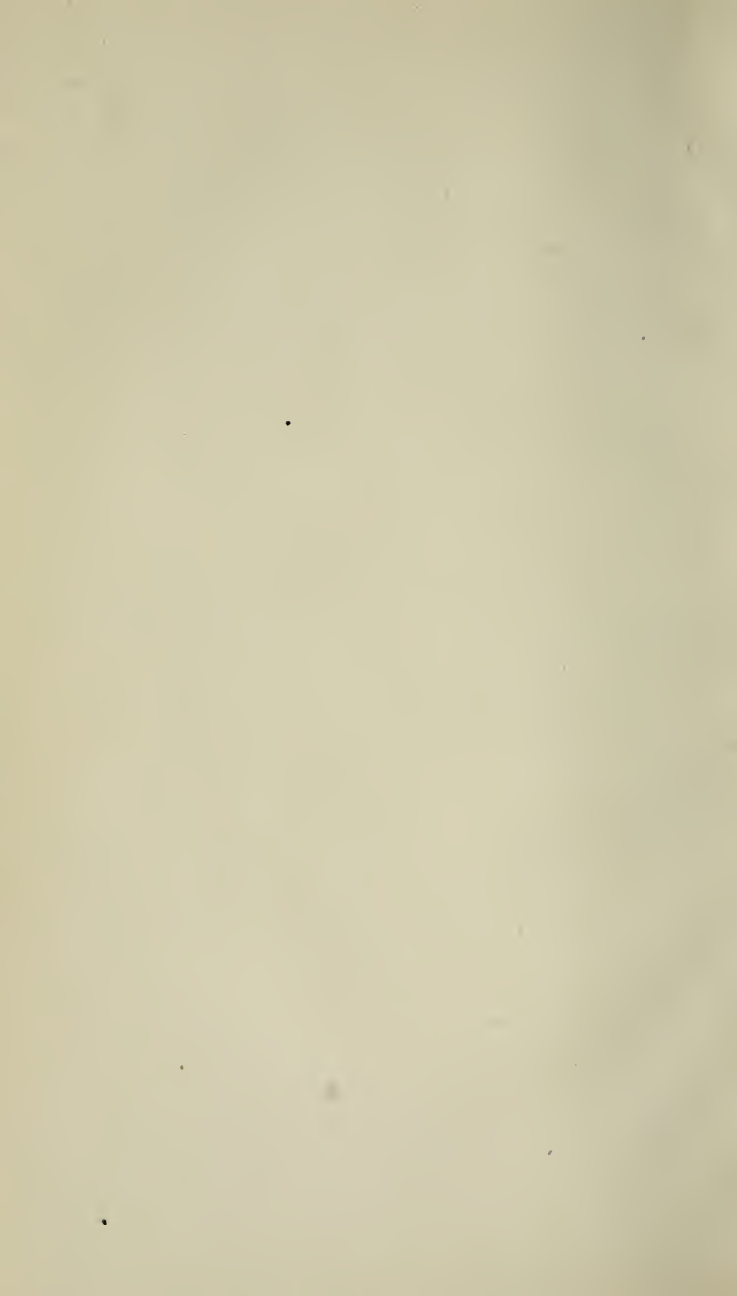
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A T T I L A.

A Romance.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "THE GIPSY," "MARY OF BURGUNDY,"
"ONE IN A THOUSAND," &c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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ATTILA.

CHAPTER I.

NEVA.

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

VOL. II.

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

The persons who attended him were entirely women, except when his faithful Cremera took his daily turn to watch by his bedside; and though an elder and more matronly dame came in and out, and frequently remained in his chamber for an hour or more, still his principal

attendant was the lovely girl whom he at first had seen, or a maiden who seemed to be her sister, still younger than herself.

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

With the matron it was different: she was kind, but not conversable; yet when she did speak, it was always in the pure Alan tongue; and Theodore could almost have fancied that he heard once more the voice of his mother. Under kind care and skilful management, he at length reached that point where his recovery became

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

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

All were employed in some domestic occupation ; and the distaff, and the spindle, and the wheel went on, while Theodore, sitting beside them, began to ask the first questions, which he had hitherto ventured, regarding the place and the family in which he then was. He found that the village, which he saw stretching along under the forest, contained not less than two or three hundred wooden cottages ; and his eye at once showed him that the

one in which he had found shelter, and received so much true kindness, was by far the most extensive and most ornamented of the whole. When he came to ask, however, whose was the house in which he dwelt, and whose the family that tended him so carefully, they answered him at once, that it was that of Bleda, the brother of Attila.

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

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

“Were Rome now,” thought Theodore, “what Rome once was, while this barbarian monarch invades and ravages the East, the legions of the West would pour across Pannonia, and, sweeping the whole land, take as hostages the women and children here left unprotected. But, alas! I fear me, that neither the legions of the East will have power to withstand the myriads of Attila, nor the West have energy to hasten his return, by invading his territories, and taking hostages for his future tranquillity. ’T is true they may not know that the land is left in such a state; but, alas! I must not point out its weakness. Even to save my country, I must not return the mercy shown me, and the kind hospitality received, by base ingratitude. Doubtless, when strength returns,

I could escape; doubtless I could bear to Valentinian, or, better still, to Ætius, tidings of the condition in which this land is left, and thereby, perchance, deliver the empire itself. But it must not be! No, no! such a task must not be mine.

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

Ruga, the wife of Bleda, however, was herself one of the Alani, from a tribe which had remained amidst their original vallies on the Georgian side of Caucasus. She had by this time learned that the mother of the young stranger had been a daughter of the same nation, though sprung from a different tribe; and, little aware of the enmity of her husband towards him, she now pressed Theodore anxiously to stay with them till the armies of the Huns

returned. Her daughter, too, urged the same request, with all the native simplicity of a guileless heart; and Theodore himself, as innocent in thought and purpose, believed that he could there remain happily, without risk or danger to the peace of any one, were it not for the enmity of Neva's father. He made inquiries, however, and he found that no chance existed of any of the Huns returning for several months; and he determined to remain for a time, hoping that if he could win the regard of the chieftain's family, the causeless animosity of Bleda himself might by their report be done away.

There, then, he staid, increasing in the love of all, and habituating himself to the language, the sports, and the manners of the people. He had found, on his recovery, that the purse of gold pieces which he had borne with him from Dalmatia, and which had been but little diminished on the journey, had been carefully preserved during his sickness; and though the amount was not very large, yet the difference in the value of every thing, amongst the Huns and amongst the

Romans, was so great, that his small store seemed grown into an inexhaustible treasure. The attendants whom Attila had given him would receive no recompense for their services; and the sports of the chase, which he pursued in company with them and Cremera, afforded more than sufficient provision for his followers and for himself. Ruga declared that her house had never been so bountifully supplied, even when Bleda himself was present; and the simpler food, to which the women of the Huns were accustomed, received no slight additions from the hunter skill and bold activity of their guest.

For several weeks Theodore pursued this course in peace, proceeding to the woods or plains, or to the mountains, early in the morning with his followers, and returning ere nightfall to the village. To those followers, indeed, the young Roman endeared himself every day more and more. His courage, and the dexterity with which he acquired all their wild art in the chase and in the management of the horse, won their reverence; while his kindness, his gentleness, and his easy suavity, touched another chord,

and gained their hearts. If stag, or wolf, or bear turned upon him, every one was ready to defend him ; and Theodore soon found that on any enterprise which he chose to undertake, except, indeed, where some higher duty forbade, he might lead those men to danger, or to death itself. Nor did he make less progress in the regard of the villagers. The old men took a pleasure in teaching him their language, and in telling him wild tales of other days, and other lands ; the children clung to him, and gathered round his knee ; the shepherds brought him whatever they found in their wanderings, which seemed to their rude eyes either rare or valuable. To his cultivated opinion all questions were referred ; and when they found that, ere two months were over, he could wield their arms, and speak their language, with as much facility as they could themselves, adding to their barbarian dexterity all the arts and knowledge of a civilised nation, they seemed to think him something more than mortal.

The wife of the chieftain forgot her matronly state, so far as to hold long conversations with him on the nation whose blood flowed in both

their veins; and her fair daughter sprang forth with eager gladness to welcome him back from the chase, or if he went not thither, wandered with him in the mornings to show him fair paths through the wood, and teach him what fruits were hurtful, what beneficial to man, in those wild solitudes; or sat near him in the evenings, and, with her long lashes veiling her cast down blue eyes, sang all the songs which she knew he loved to hear.

It was those deep blue eyes, and their look of devoted tenderness, which first woke Theodore from his dream of peace. Neva was lovely, gentle, kind, noble in all her feelings, graceful in all her movements, frank, simple, and sincere. Pure in heart and mind, the elegancies of polished life seemed scarcely needful to her native grace. In whatever task employed, she looked, she acted, as — and no one could doubt she was — the daughter of a king: and yet Theodore's thoughts were seldom upon her. Sometimes, indeed, when he saw a flower of peculiar beauty, or when his arrows struck some bird of rare plumage, or some beast of a finer fur, he

thought, " I will take this home for Neva ;" but his fancy never strayed amiss to warmer feelings or more dangerous themes than those.

Oh, no ! his thoughts were far away ! The one deep-rooted passion, strong and intense as life itself — that one bright passion, as pure, when it is noble, in man as in woman, as incapable of falsehood either by thought or act — left not one fond fancy free for any other than her his first, young, early, only love. When the sun in floods of glory went down beyond the western hills, he thought of her lonely in that distant land, and willingly believed that with her, too, memory turned to him. When the bright moon wandered through the sky, and poured her silver flood of light over those wide plains, he would gaze forth, and call to mind that first peculiar night when he heard the dear lips he loved breathe answering vows to his beneath the palace portico on the Dalmatian shore : he would call up again before his eyes the scene in all its loveliness ; he would fancy he could feel that soft, dear form pressed gently to his bosom ; he would seem to taste the breath of those sweet

lips as they met his in the kiss of first acknowledged love; and he would imagine — justly, truly imagine — that at that hour the same treasured remembrances might fill the bosom of Ildica with visions as entrancing, and that memory might with her, too, give to hope a basis whereon to raise her brightest architecture. When the morning woke in the skies, and when, ere he went forth to taste the joys of renewed existence, he knelt down, to offer to the God of his pure faith, adoration, and thanks and prayer, the name of Ildica would first rise with his petitions to Heaven, and her happiness would be the subject of his first aspiration.

Could he think then of any other? could he dream that it was possible to love any one but her? No! he did not, he could not! But as time wore on, and summer sunk glowing into the arms of autumn, there came a deep light into the eyes of Neva, which pained, which alarmed him. He would sometimes, when he suddenly turned towards her, find her gazing upon him with a look of intense, thoughtful affection, which was followed by a warm and rapid blush; and with-

out one feeling of empty vanity, Theodore began to see that his stay might produce evil to her who had so kindly tended him.

Still, however, Neva's regard assumed that air of simple unrestrained frankness which is less frequently the token of love than of friendship. In her pure mind, and in her uncultivated land, all seemed clear and open before her. She felt no shame in the sensations which she knew and encouraged towards the young stranger. She saw no obstacle to prevent her from becoming his bride. She was the daughter of a king, but she knew him to be worthy of her love; and as that love became apparent to her own eyes also, she only felt proud of her choice. The sole difference which that knowledge of her own heart's feelings wrought in Neva was, that with her bright brown hair she now began to mingle gold and gems, and that from time to time a bright but transient glow would tinge her cheek when her eyes and Theodore's met. Far from shrinking from his society, far from trembling at his approach, she gave way at once to all the feelings

of her heart as they arose ; greeted him with glad smiles in the morning ; sprang forth to meet him when he returned from the chase ; sat by him in the lengthening evenings ; and feeling the deep earnest love of first affection burning at her heart, she took no means to hide or to conceal it from others or herself.

Theodore had pondered over these things for some days, and considered how it were best to act ; but he deceived himself in regard to Neva ; and the very openness with which she suffered her passion to appear, made him believe that it was as yet unconfirmed. He compared it with the shy and trembling love of Ildica. He remembered the same kind affection in her, too, when a girl, ere their feelings took a warmer tone than brotherly regard ; the candid display of preference for his society, and the interest in all his pursuits, which she had then evinced. He recollected also the change that had taken place as simple affection grew into intense love — how timid, how retiring, how apprehensive that love had been ! — and by comparing those two stages of a passion he had known and

marked, with the conduct of the lovely girl under whose father's roof he dwelt — as pure, as innocent, as full of real modesty as Ildica herself — he judged, that whatever her feelings might become, they were not yet such as might ever render them painful to herself.

As the period for which he had promised to remain, had not yet expired, and he could assign no cause for suddenly absenting himself, he determined to seek the first opportunity of speaking in the presence of Neva, of the ties which bound him to her he loved. Little mention had hitherto been made of his family or his circumstances in his own land. The wife of Bleda seemed to take no farther interest in his former life than was connected with his mother and her nation; and Neva herself, in the present happiness which she derived from his stay amongst them, appeared never to remember that there was such a thing as *a past*, affecting him in a way she knew not — though that past was unfortunately destined to affect all the future for herself. She asked nothing, she thought of nothing, but of the present; and thus Theodore felt, that he

would have to commence the subject himself. Though it was one he loved not to speak on upon every light occasion, yet he resolved to do so. But still, after long hesitation, he determined not to tell the tale of his early days when, sitting in the family of Bleda, every eye might be ready to mark his own emotions — or, indeed, those of others; for, although to his own heart he put forward the motive, of concealing the expression of his feelings, his real inducement was consideration for the fair girl, who might be more moved, he feared, by the words he had to speak than he was willing to admit even to himself.

After two long days of unsuccessful hunting, having found nothing within several miles of the village, he threw down his spear and arrows, declaring he would go no more; and on the following morning, while the dew was still upon the grass, Neva offered to lead him up to the fall of a river in the woods, whose roar he had often heard at a distance, but which he had never seen, so deeply was it buried in the intricacies of the forest. He gladly followed, re-

solved to seize that moment to tell her all. And yet Theodore was agitated, for he wished not to pain or to grieve her; but still he feared, from her whole manner, and from the tender light which poured from her blue eyes, that the words he had to speak would be displeasing to her ear. It was a bright morning, and between the tall trunks of the trees, over bush and underwood, and mossy turf, the slanting sun poured his golden light, in the first bright freshness of the rising day.

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

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

“Oh yes,” answered Theodore, “we have many; and these mornings and the evenings are our chief hours of delight, for the heat of the risen day is oppressive. I remember such a morning as this,” he added, willing to lead the conversation to the matter on which he desired

to speak — “I remember such a morning, some four or five months ago, so bright, so beautiful, shining upon my path, as I returned from Constantinople, towards what I have always called my home.”

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

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

Neva spoke not, but the rose again left her cheek. That, however, was the only sign of emotion she displayed, except, perhaps, that she walked on more rapidly, and that her small

feet brushed the dew from the grass on either side of the path, wavering, as she went, with an unsteady pace. Theodore followed close to her side, scarce knowing how to break that painful silence. It had continued so long, that, ere a word was uttered, he heard the roar of the waterfall, and he resolved to speak, let it be on what it would. But at the first word he breathed, the fair girl pressed her right hand upon her heart with a convulsive sob, and fell fainting at his feet.

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

At length she opened her eyes; and finding herself lying in the arms of the man she loved, with her head supported on his shoulder, she turned her face to his bosom, and wept long and bitterly. Theodore said little, but all he did say were words of kindness and of comfort;

and Neva seemed to feel them as such, and thanked him by a gentle pressure of the hand. At length she spoke. "I had thought," she said, in the undisguised simplicity of her heart, "I had thought to be your first and only wife. I was foolish to think that others would not love you as well as I."

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

"Better, far better, that it should not," cried the girl, raising her head, and gazing full in his face, with those earnest devoted eyes. "Better, far better, that it should not. Had you asked me, I could not have refused, feeling as I feel; but I should have been miserable to be the second to any one. To have seen you caress her, to have known that you loved her better, and had loved her earlier than you loved me, would have been daily misery; but now I can love you as a thing apart. You will marry her,

and I will have no jealousy, for I have no share : I will think of you every hour, and every moment, and pray to all the gods to make you happy with her you love. But oh, stranger, it were better, till I can rule my feelings and my words, and gain full command over every thought, that you should leave me."

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

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

"I do, I do, indeed," cried Theodore — "I do know, I do admire, I do esteem you; and had

not every feeling of my heart been bound to another ere I saw you, I could not have failed to love one so beautiful, so excellent, so kind. Nay, I do love you, Neva, though it must be as a brother loves a sister."

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

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

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

She then spoke for some time longer, in a tranquil tone, of all the arrangements that were to be made; and as she did so, still, from time to time, her eyes were raised to the young Roman’s face with a long earnest glance, as if she would fain have fixed his image upon me-

mory, so that no years could blot it out. Then, in the stream, she bathed the traces of the tears from her eyes; and looking up calmly, though sadly, said, "Let us go, my brother. It is sweet, but it must end."

They took some steps homeward; but ere ere they had gone far she paused, and laying her hands upon his, she said, "Oh, Theodore! promise me, that if ever, while you are in our land, you need help or aid, you will send to me. Send me this trinket back by a messenger;" and she gave him one of the small golden ornaments which she wore in her hair: "send it me back, and I will come to you, be it wheresoever it may. Deeply as I love thee, I would not wed thee now for worlds; but, oh! I would give life itself to render thee some service, which should make thee say in after years, 'Alas! poor Neva! she loved me well, indeed!'"

Thus wandered they homeward; and often did she pause to add something more, and to give some new token of that deep, and all unconcealed, but pure affection, which had taken

so firm a hold of her young heart. Theodore, too, strove to soothe and to comfort her; and all that was kind, all that was tender—except such words as only the ear of the beloved should ever hear—he said, to give her consolation. As they came near the village, however, she spoke less, for she seemed to fear that her emotions might leave traces behind for other eyes than his; but she gained courage as they went on; and, to Theodore’s surprise, when they joined the household, no sign of all the busy feelings which he knew to be active in her breast was in the slightest degree apparent, except, indeed, in a shade of grave melancholy, which was not natural to her.

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

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

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

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

"T'is not unlikely," said the wife of Bleda,

“but still, my son, you must obey: tarry not here more days than needful; for we know not when Attila or Bleda may return.”

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

Theodore himself could have wept; and as he saw her stand there in her beauty, her innocence, and her devoted love, deeply and bitterly did he regret—ay, and reproach himself, for having, however unwittingly, brought a cloud

over her sunshine, and first dulled the fine metal of her bright and affectionate heart. He sprang upon his horse, and rode away, turning back more than once to gaze upon them, as they stood gathered round the door of their dwelling, and to wave his hand in token of adieu.

CHAP. II.

THE HERMITS.

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

scene may be fair and sweet, a solitary well in the desert, which cools our lip, and quenches our thirst, but supplies no river, waters no distant land. Sometimes it is terrible and dangerous, a thunder-storm, suddenly sweeping over the summer sky, coming when all is brightness, reigning an hour in awful majesty, and then passing away, and leaving the world as tranquil as it was before.

Theodore rode on, taking his way across the woods, and asking his heart what was to come next; what, in all the vast, vague variety of earthly chances, was the next thing that was to befall him on his onward way. When, but a few short months before, he had stood upon the mount of cypresses with those he loved, and had gazed over the calm splendour of the Adriatic Sea, with life all before him, and hope to lead him on, he had fancied that his fate would be as fair and bright as the glowing scene beneath his eyes; his future had promised to be as calm and unbroken by a storm, as those tranquil waters, sleeping, unruffled, beneath the setting sun. Had any one

less than a prophet then told him all that the next two months should witness, he would have laughed the prediction to scorn, in the full confiding hope of undisappointed youth. But now that for many a week every hour had brought its change, that he had seen the expectations of to-day, to-morrow trampled under foot, and the sunshine of the morning darkened ere the evening's close, he had learned still to ask himself, "What next?" with every day that rose, and every change of scene that came upon him. That blessed reliance on the dear deluding tales of hope, which is youth's peculiar power, had left him for ever; and though the "What next?" might be asked, with the determination of bearing all worthily, yet apprehension had always its share in the question too.

The woods were wide and intricate; and, as Theodore and his companions rode on, the trees and shrubs began to change their character: enormous birches tossed about upon the rocks and rising grounds, succeeded to the beech and oak; and after them again came the tender larch, and the dark pine, as the road began to wind

up into the mountains. It was a sultry autumn day; and the misty haze that hung about the world, with the close electric air of the forest, were ominous of a thunder-storm; and at length the clouds, gathering round the summits of the higher hills, burst upon the heads of Theodore and his followers, just as they had reached a spot, where, from the top of the first range of eminences, they could gaze over a wide extent of forest ground. The rain poured down in torrents, the lightning flickered through the sky; but neither of those would have prevented Theodore from pursuing his way, had not the mountain paths they followed become so slippery with the rain that his horse could not advance, and even the lighter and more sure-footed beasts of the Huns could make no progress.

They were debating as to where they could find shelter, when suddenly they beheld, standing on the rock above, a tall thin human form, scantily covered by its tattered robes from the wind or storm. He was gazing down upon them without speaking; but Theodore, as soon as he turned his eyes that way, recollected the enthusiast

Mizetus, who had attempted to persuade the people, during the earthquake in Dalmatia, to stay and perish amidst the ruins of the falling palace. He had heard long before that the enthusiast had wandered over many parts of the earth, and had dwelt long in deserts and barren places as an hermit, according to the prevailing superstition of the day; and the young Roman doubted not, that since he had been driven forth by the partial destruction of Aspalthos, Mizetus had again returned to his erratic life, and found his way to the frontiers of Pannonia. "Go up to him, Cremera," said Theodore — "Go up to him, and, telling him who we are, ask him where we can find shelter, for he must surely have some cave or hut wherein to dwell himself."

The Arab obeyed, leaving his horse below; but the enthusiast made him no reply, gazing sternly and even fiercely at him, till the freedman used some angry words to drive him to an answer. He then exclaimed aloud, "Get ye gone! get ye gone from me, ye miserable, worldly, self-seeking generation! get ye

gone ! Ye shall not pollute my dwelling. Farther on, ye will find one who will give welcome alike to the lustful Roman and the bloody, barbarous Hun. Get ye gone ! I will have nought to do with ye. On, on upon the path, I say : ye will find shelter onward, to cover your heads from the earthly storm, though not from the tempest of God's indignation."

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

Theodore hesitated not; but leading his horse towards the narrow mouth of a cavern, which he now beheld, ascended the steep path with

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

principally clothed with the same materials, though arranged in a more convenient and agreeable form : his bed, which was raised high with rushes and forest hay, was piled up above that with soft and warm skins ; and the contributions not only of some neighbouring villages on the other side of the hills, but of many distant towns (for the whole land regarded him as a holy being), supplied him plentifully with good and varied food. His appearance, however, was venerable ; and his countenance, half covered as it was with a long white beard and a profusion of silvery hair, was calm, peaceful, and mild, and well calculated to obtain both reverence and love. There was, indeed, an occasional look of worldly shrewdness seen upon those high but withered features, which might have made many a suspicious man doubt the sincerity of his vocation ; but there came also from his eyes, from time to time, gleams of quick uncertain light : whenever he approached particular subjects, too, his whole air and manner changed, his colour mounted, his eye flashed, his lip quivered ;

and Theodore could not gaze upon that countenance, under all its frequent changes, without believing that some slight touch of insanity had warped an intellect originally fitted for high and noble things. When he rose to welcome the strangers, his beard fell down below his girdle, and his long nails, untrimmed for many a year, were exposed in all their deformity. His manners, however, were noble, one might say, courtly, for there was grace as well as dignity, and polished terms as well as mild and benevolent ideas. He asked no questions, neither whence the strangers came, nor whither they were going; but gladly gave them shelter from the storm, and spread before them such viands as his cell contained, pressing them to partake with hospitable care, and blessing, in the name of God, the food to which he invited them. His eye, however, rested upon Theodore; and though the youth had by this time adopted in a great degree the dress of the Huns, yet his air and countenance were not to be mistaken, and the hermit addressed him at once in Latin.

“There is a hermit from our native land,”

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

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

instead of quitting the falling buildings, prophesying that the last day was about to appear."

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

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

"During the whole of this day," continued the old man, when he saw that the young Ro-

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

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

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

Theodore would not suffer himself to smile, although he thought that the hermit, like many

another man, might deceive himself in regard to his own powers, and confound shrewd calculations with presages. The old man had heard, it seemed, that Attila was likely to return; the messengers might very probably have dropped some hint as to the time; and, the mind of the hermit himself having calculated the probabilities, the impression that it would be as he anticipated had become so strong that he looked upon that impression as a certain presage; and, if fulfilled, would consider it, thenceforth, as a new instance of his prophetic inspiration.

Theodore restrained all expression of such thoughts, however, and merely replied, "Then, by his sending you presents, you already know Attila, and are protected by him?"

"I know him, my son," replied the old man; "but I am protected by a higher King than he is. He rather may call himself protected by me, or, at the least, *directed*, though he, as I am, is but an instrument in the hands of God. The sins of those who call themselves Christians have gone up on high," he continued, whilst a

wild and wandering gleam of light glistened in his eyes, and his pale cheek flushed — “ the sins of those who call themselves Christians have gone up on high, and the vices of the east and the west have risen up to heaven as foul and filthy as the smoke of a heathen sacrifice. They have called down judgments upon the earth; lightnings, and tempests, and earthquakes, and sickness, and pestilence, and warfare; and, lo! amongst the visitations of God, I tell thee, young man, this Attila, the King, is one of the greatest — an appointed instrument to punish the iniquities of the land! So long as he shall do exactly the work assigned to him, and not disobey the word that is spoken, he shall prosper on his way, and shall sweep the lands from the east to the west, and from the north to the south: he shall stretch out one hand, and it shall touch the Propontic gulf; and he shall stretch out the other, and dip it in the German ocean; but neither the city of Romulus nor the palace of Constantine shall he see or injure. He shall pull down the cities, he shall destroy the nations, he shall trample under foot the yellow

corn, and the purple fig, and the sweet grape. Of their olive trees he shall light fires to warm him in the night; and with their flocks and herds he shall feed the myriads that follow him to victory and spoil. Armies shall not stand before him for an hour, and fenced cities shall not keep him out: he shall destroy wherever he cometh, and behind him he shall leave a bare plain; but the life of not one of those appointed to be saved shall he take; and if he touch but a hair of their heads, the power shall pass away from him, and he shall die a death pitiful and despised. Lo! he comes, he comes!" and spreading wide his arms, with a wild but striking gesture, he advanced to the mouth of the cavern, and gazed out upon the road below.

Theodore, who had also heard the sound of horses' feet apparently approaching up from below, followed the hermit and gazed forth likewise. The thunder had ceased, and the rain was falling but slowly, yet the ground was not less slippery and dangerous than when he himself had passed. Nevertheless, coming almost at full speed, was seen a horseman, followed by

two others at some short distance behind. Not a false step, not a stumble, did the charger make; and Theodore at once perceived that the announcement of the hermit was correct, and that it was Attila himself who approached to within a yard of the spot where they stood. He came at the same headlong speed; and then, alighting from his horse, he threw the bridle over its neck, and entered the cavern, with a slow, calm, and tranquil step. The monarch gazed at Theodore for a moment, as if surprised at beholding him there, but no slight emotions ever found their way to the countenance of Attila; and his only observation was, “Ha! my son, art thou here?”

Theodore bent his head, and the monarch turned to the hermit, who pronounced in his favour a singular prayer, one, indeed, which Theodore imagined might give no light offence to the stern chieftain of the Huns. “May God enlighten thine eyes,” he said, “and purify thy spirit, and soften thy hard heart, and make thee quit the abomination of thine idols, so that thou mayst become a servant of the true

God, and not merely an instrument of his vengeance !”

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

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

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

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

Ere Attila could reply, the sunshine, which was now beginning to pour into the mouth of

the cavern, was darkened by a tall form, which advanced with wild gestures, and placed itself directly before the monarch of the Huns. It was that of the enthusiast Mizetus; who, in the exalted and menacing tone in which he usually spoke, now addressed the King, exclaiming, "Woe, woe, unto the nations that thou wert ever born! Woe, woe, unto the world, far and near, oh, son of Belial, that thou didst ever see the light! Thou art dyed in blood; thou dost ride in gore. The earthquake precedes thee; blue lightnings march with thy host; famine goes forth on thy right hand, and pestilence on thy left."

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

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

"I have said what is true," continued the enthusiast, "and there is more truth to be

said. Woe unto thee if thou doest not the will of God! I say, woe unto thee! for, if thou failest to do his will, all the evils that thou pourest forth upon the nations shall, in return, be poured forth upon thee; nor shalt thou raise thyself up in the pride of thine heart, and say, ‘It is I who do all these things!’ Neither shalt thou suffer thyself to be puffed up by the praises of the weak beings who now surround thee. Know that thou art no more than a sword in the hands of the slayer; a rod in the hands of Him who is appointed to chastise. Henceforth and for ever cast away thy vain titles, and abandon thine idle pretences. Thy name is **THE SCOURGE OF GOD**; and through all nations, and unto all ages, by that name shalt thou be known.”

“I will fulfil thy words, and do accept the name,” replied Attila, calmly; “yes, I will be called the Scourge of God; and truly,” he added, with a dark smile, “I have already scourged the land from the Danube to the sea. But now, my friend, hast thou more to say? for though we reverence madmen, and those

whose intellects the gods have taken into their own keeping, still my time is precious, and I would be alone."

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

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

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

Theodore craved a blessing of the hermit, and then departed. The road still mounted for some way; but by this time the rain was over, and, as a drying wind rose up, the horses could better keep their feet upon the steep and rocky ground. Passing over the ridge of the

* It would appear, from various accounts, that the tremendous title by which Attila was well pleased to be known, was given to him as stated above, though some lay the scene of his interview with the Hermit in Gaul.

mountain, the road, in about half an hour, began to descend through woody glens and wild rocky ravines, similar to those which they had passed in ascending; and as Theodore slowly pursued his way, he revolved in his own mind that part of the conversation between the hermit and the mighty monarch of the Huns, which referred more particularly to himself. It was not difficult to discover that, actuated by superstitious feeling, Attila had, in consequence of some vague warning of the hermit, spared the young Roman, not from any prepossession in his favour, but solely because he thought it the command of Heaven, and a condition on which the success of his enterprise depended. Since those first events, however, the monarch had shown him kindness of an extraordinary character; and either from some vague notion of their fate being linked together, by some unexplained and mysterious tie, or from natural feeling of favour towards him, had evinced an interest in his fate and happiness which demanded gratitude. Theodore was not one to reason very nicely as to how far the motives of a

benefactor lessen the obligation imposed by his kindness; and he only remembered that Attila had twice saved his life, as well as spared him where any other Roman would have fallen, when he intruded uncalled into the Dacian territory; that he had rescued from worse than death those he most loved, and had shown a kindly sympathy with feelings that few supposed him to possess. Thus, though he revolved the means of learning more of what were the first motives of the King in giving him such protection, he determined, as he rode on with his followers, to seek every opportunity of showing his just gratitude towards Attila.

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

“Art thou quite recovered, my son?” de-

manded the King. "We heard that thou hadst been ill, and likely to die; but the gods protect those whom they love."

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

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

Though the words of the King might have led to a fuller explanation of the mysterious tie by which he seemed to feel himself bound to Theodore, yet the interest of the young Roman was more strongly excited by the mention of barba-

rian triumphs in his native land, than by any thing which could personally affect himself; and he replied, with an inquiring tone, “ I have heard nothing, O Attila ! of thy progress since I left thee. I have received no tidings even of how the war has gone.”

“ War !” said Attila, proudly; “ I call that war where brave men encounter one another, and fight till one surrenders or dies; but such is not that which the Romans have offered to Attila. Wouldst thou know, youth, how my march through Mœsia and Thrace has gone? Thus has it happened; but call it not a warfare, for warfare there has been none. I have marched upon the necks of conquered enemies to the Ægean Sea. Hœmus and Rhodope have not stayed me; seventy fortified cities have fallen before me; and the last Roman army which dared to look me in the face lies rotting in the Thracian Chersonese, as thou doest call it, or feeds the vultures from Mount Ida. I found the land a garden, and I left it a desert, even as I promised to do; but I say unto the weak thing that sits upon the eastern throne, ‘ Why hast

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

“And did none resist thee?” demanded Theodore sorrowfully. “Did none show that

the spirit of our fathers still lives at least in some of the children?"

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

again without just cause. Attila slays not without cause; but thine is a lettered nation, and they will transmit a false tale of these deeds unto after times. We Huns write not our own histories."

CHAP. III.

THE CHASE OF THE URUS.

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

Upon a wide plain, broken by some tracts of wood, and skirted by some rich sloping hills, at the foot of which it rested, stood a congregation of several thousands of low wooden dwellings, each separated from the other, and covering a large space of ground; but with all their

lowliness, those houses were not without ornament — of a different kind, it is true, from that which decked the stately mansions of Rome or Constantinople, but suited to the buildings, the people, and the scene. Before each ran along the same long portico, supported by the trunks of trees, which Theodore had remarked in the dwelling of Bleda; and many an ornamental screen and piece of trellis-work gave lightness and beauty to various parts of the building. Trees were scattered here and there amongst the houses, giving shade to their high peaked roofs; and flowers and shrubs were not wanting, such as the infant art of the age and country could produce.

Many a busy group was there, engaged in all the peaceful occupations of pastoral life; and though here, as before, women and children formed the greater part of the population, a number of men — mingling with the other groups — showed Theodore that the land had not been so entirely left without defenders as he had imagined. As he rode on, and entered the streets — if by such name we can designate the

wide open spaces between the houses — the population became more dense ; and he observed amongst them every shade of complexion and every line of feature that it is possible to conceive. The colour and cast of countenance of the Huns was certainly more general than any other, but there also might be seen the Roman and the Greek, the beautiful tribes of Caucasus, the fair-haired children of the North, the Goth, the Vandal, and the Helvetian. Nor was this mixture merely apparent, but, on the contrary, it was borne out by the many tongues which struck the ear of Theodore as he rode along. There his own language was frequently heard, there the tongue of his mother's land was common ; and not only did Theodore recognise Greeks and Romans as captives or bondsmen, but many walked free and armed amongst the rest of the population, as if holding rank and authority amongst them. The young Roman now began to perceive that Attila, with wise policy, had left the guardianship of his land during his absence to persons whose situation, as fugitives or exiles from their native country,

would render their resistance to any invading force desperate, determined, and unconquerable. He himself, as he passed, excited no great attention, for the Roman features, with the Hunnish dress, was too common amongst them to call forth much remark. Cremera the Arab, however, by his powerful limbs and his gigantic height, drew all eyes upon the little troop, as it advanced towards the mansion of the King; and Theodore heard many an observation made upon him and his, in tongues which the speakers thought he could not understand, but which were familiar to his ear.

At length they reached the open space in which the dwelling of Attila was placed. It was merely a wooden building like the rest, but far more extended, and though as simple as any in some respects, yet much more ornamented and tasteful in others. Besides the principal mansion, a number of smaller houses were congregated in the same space, probably destined for the reception of his immediate officers and friends; but the whole mass of buildings thus collected was separated from the rest by a piece

f open ground, spreading on all sides, to the extent of several acres. In this space a number of horsemen were exercising themselves with various arms, poising the spear, casting the javelin, drawing the bow, or urging the mock contest with the sword. Under the porticoes, and within the low screens, groups of women and children were seen employed in various household occupations and juvenile amusements; and the whole presented a picture of cheerful, active, and happy life, which might have taught an inexperienced heart to believe, that amongst that people was to be found the wished-for state, where busy life proceeded in peaceful tranquillity, without the cares, the anxieties, the jealousies, the strifes, of more civilised and more corrupt society.

Theodore rode on, as he had been directed, towards the gate of the principal dwelling; but he was surprised, and somewhat offended, as he came near, by one of the horsemen, who was careering in the open space, hurling a javelin right across his path, so as to pass within a foot of his head. Theodore's nerves, however,

were too strongly strung to give way even to the slightest appearance of emotion, and urging forward his horse, rather than checking it, he passed on, without noticing a loud and scornful laugh, which burst from the young man who had cast the dart. Cremera, who rode a little behind his master, turned and gazed fiercely round, while the Hunnish youth, and those who were sporting with him, dashed in amongst the followers of Theodore, as if on purpose to disturb him, separating a part of them from the rest. Theodore was now turning to remonstrate; but he heard the chief of his attendants already in sharp discussion with his fellow-countrymen; and the first words that caught his ear made him resolve to abstain from even remonstrance, in a case which might add new causes of anxiety and circumstances of difficulty to his long and painful exile amongst the Huns.

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

“ Well ! ” answered Theodore’s attendant.
“ You are Ellac, the son of the King, yourself a

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

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

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

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

"If it have drank the blood of our nation,"

replied Ellac, "he that wields it should be slain."

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

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

There Theodore dismounted from his horse, and in a moment was surrounded by a number of those who were spending their idleness under the shade of the portico. A mixed and motley group they were, comprising old warriors, unfit any longer to draw the sword, beautiful girls of various ages, — from that at which the future loveliness bursts forth from the green film of childhood, like the first opening of the rose, to that at which charms that have seen the fulness

of the summer day spread out in their last unfaded hours, like the same rose when its leaves are first ready to fall. Children, too, were there, and many a slave from every distant land, with mutes and dwarfs, singers, jesters, and buffoons.*

A number of these, as we have said, now crowded round Theodore, with looks of interest and expectation, while others, listless and unheeding, lay quietly in the sun, casting their eyes, with idle carelessness, upon the stranger, without thinking it worth their while to move. Many was the question that was now asked, and many was the curious trait which struck the sight of Theodore. But we must not pause to paint minutely the life and manners of the Huns. That Attila was on his march home-

* Both the Greek and Roman historians strive to impress their readers with the idea that the Huns were mere Scythian savages; but at every line they let fall something which impugns this assertion. We find that gold, gems, silver, tables, various kinds of drinks of their own manufacture, fire arms and equipments, jesters, dwarfs, singing, and several games of chance were common amongst them: and in short that there was an extraordinary mixture of civilised arts with barbarian habits.

ward was already known at the royal village, and orders had been received regarding the treatment of the young stranger. One of the houses in the same enclosure as that of the monarch had been appointed him for a dwelling; and having taken up his abode therein, he found himself served and supplied as if he had been one of the barbarian king's own children.

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

The women, too, whatever their rank or station amongst the people, were seen sitting before their dwellings twirling the spindle in

the sun, or occupied in other domestic cares which had long since been abandoned by the polished and luxurious dames of Rome.

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

For several days Theodore remained almost totally without society; for after the first movement of curiosity the inhabitants of the palace took no further notice of him, and no one else sought for his acquaintance, except, indeed, some of those Romans who had abandoned their country and assumed the appearance of the Huns. Several of these, it is true, presented themselves at his dwelling, and would fain have looked upon him as one of themselves; but Theo-

dore was on his guard, and he received their advances somewhat coldly. He was ready, indeed, to meet with kindly friendship any one whom the arm of injustice had driven from their native land, and who preserved pure their faith and honour, but unwilling to hold an hour's companionship with men who had been scourged forth by their own vices, or had betrayed their native land for the gratification of any passion, whether the sordid hope of gain, the wild thirst of ambition, or the burning fury of revenge. Of all who thus came to him he was suspicious, and his doubts were not removed by their manners; for all more or less affected to graft upon the polish of the Roman the rude and barbarian fierceness of the Hun. Though accustomed to a more refined, though perhaps not a better, state of society, they endeavoured to assume the manners of the nation amongst whom they dwelt; and the mixture thus produced was both painful and disgusting to the feelings of the young Roman, whose character was too decided in its nature ever to change by its contact with others, and possessed too much dignity to affect

manners of any kind but those which sprang from his own heart, tutored as it had been from youth in habits of graceful ease.

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

No man hated more effeminacy, no one more despised sensual luxury ; but he thought that refined manners and refined taste might exist with virtue, purity, even simplicity ; and he thought also that as the most precious sub-

stances, the hardest metals, and the brightest stones, take the finest polish, so the most generous heart, the firmest and the most exalted mind, are those most capable of receiving the highest degree of civilisation. At all events, he felt sure that no one who had tasted the refinements of cultivated life could lose their taste for what was graceful and elegant; and that if, from any hatred of the vices or follies which had crept into a decaying empire, they fled to a more simple and less corrupted state, they would still prize highly, and maintain in themselves, that noble suavety, that generous urbanity, which springs from the feelings of a kind, a self-possessed, and a dignified mind.

These opinions, as I have said, he did not scruple to express boldly and distinctly; and he soon found that such notions, together with those he entertained regarding patriotism, and the duty of every man towards his country, were not pleasant to the ears of his visitors. Some slunk away with feelings of shame, not altogether extinct in their bosoms. Some boldly scoffed at such prejudiced ideas; and only one or two, with calm

expressions of regret, acknowledged that they felt as he did, and only lamented that injustice and oppression had driven them from the society in which they had been accustomed to dwell, and the refined pleasures which they were capable of enjoying, to the wilds of Dacia, and the company of barbarians. With these Theodore would not have been unwilling to associate: but ere he did so, he sought to see more of them, and to hear their history from other lips than their own; and, therefore, with a coldness of demeanour, which was not natural to him, he received all advances from his fellow-countrymen.

Ellac, the son of Attila, he saw no more; and he was glad to be spared fresh collision with one who was evidently ill disposed towards him, and who was so dangerous an enemy. He strove not to avoid any one, however, but walked forth alone amongst the houses of the Huns, with that fearless calmness which is generally its own safeguard. Still he saw, without choosing to remark it, that Cremera's apprehensions for his safety were greater than

his own; and that though he ventured not to remonstrate against any part of his master's behaviour, yet whenever the young Roman went forth on foot towards the close of day, to enjoy the calm hour of evening in that tranquil meditation with which it seems to sympathise, he caught a glance, here and there, of the tall, dusky form of the Arab, following his footsteps with watchful care.

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

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

the top, of a lateral shoot of those high mountains which crossed the country to the eastward.

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

Remarking the course of the stream when first he entered the wood, he ordered his attendants to spread out at some distance from himself, and drive the game towards the river, the banks of which he himself proposed to follow. Little appeared, however, and that of a kind not worthy of pursuit. A wolf, indeed, crossed his path, and, casting his javelin at it, he struck the grim robber of the fold down to

the ground; but shaking it quickly from his weapon he passed on, and for near an hour followed the side of the stream, hearing from time to time the cries of his attendants, as they shouted, both to give notice to their companions of the course they were pursuing, and to scare the game from the lair.

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

to himself, "They will soon rejoin me: the river sweeps round again not far on."

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

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

Then, giving a hasty glance to the river, he

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

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

One object, however, in that space occupied all his attention, one feeling took possession of his heart, and but one course was left him to pursue. In the midst, clothed in a shaggy

mane, with foam covering its black nostrils and fury flashing from its dark sinister eyes, its foot planted on a hound that it had just killed, and its enormous neck bent and head drawn back, in act to strike again with the short but pointed horns upon its wide square brow, stood the Urus, which the dogs had driven from its mountain solitudes.

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

On one moment hung life or death; and, even while his horse was clearing the last brushwood, Theodore, with all the strength and swiftness of youth and vigour, hurled his unerring javelin at the monster. It struck him but slightly, for the youth's hand was shaken by the spring of

his horse ; but it flew so swiftly, that the sharp steel cut through the tough hide upon his back, just as he was dashing forward to crush the boy to atoms. It shook and turned him ; and as the young Hun writhed partly on one side, the fury of the animal's stroke was spent upon the dying horse. Mad, however, with pain, he now turned upon his new assailant ; but Theodore, active as well as strong, snatched the second javelin from his saddle bow, sprang from his horse, and met the brute as he rushed upon him.

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

There were now the cries of coming huntsmen, but no time was left for distant succour to arrive. On himself, on himself alone, the

young Roman was forced to depend; and, drawing his short sword, he again stood prepared to meet the assault of his adversary. With his eyes not now closed as before, but keenly watching his prey, the Urus again rushed upon him; and Theodore, knowing that, though his sword was sharp, and his arm was strong, it was in vain to strike at that bony head, or that thick and heavy mane, again sprang on one side, but farther than before, more to avoid the first rush than to strike the animal as he passed.

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

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

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

CHAP. IV.

THE NEW FRIENDS AND NEW ENEMIES.

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

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

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

For an instant his eye ran over the tremendous limbs of the Urus, the broad square head, the tangled mane, from amidst the thick coarse hair of which the dark blood was pouring out in streams, and upon the sharp pointed horns, one of which had burrowed in the earth, as he had rolled over in the agonies of death — and then he turned his look upon his boy. The next instant he held out his hand to Theodore, saying, “Thou hast saved my child! — Well and truly did yon holy man declare, that the safety of myself and of my race depended upon him whom I should first meet, as I marched against the Romans; and that the first act of forbearance and mercy which I showed should be followed by benefits that I could never repay. Nor was that all. When you met me on the mountain, young Roman, scarce a week since, that same old man, gazing from the brink of the Everlasting, and beholding the future like a valley at his feet, traced out the after life of this my youngest son. He should escape from mighty perils, the Prophet said, and be the last who should survive to carry on my race. Has

he not now escaped from mighty peril by thine aid? and though it was foredoomed, deep and heartfelt is the gratitude which I owe thee, for saving the life of this my boy, at the immediate hazard of thine own. Attila thanks thee, and will keep the memory of this deed in his heart. I have called thee my son, oh Theodore, and shalt thou not be unto me a son indeed? Ay, and a well beloved son too, only next in place to him whom thou hast rescued from untimely death."

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

"Let mutual benefits bind us to each other,

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

Thus saying, the monarch mounted; a fresh horse was soon found for the boy Ernac; and Theodore followed by the side of the youth, who, talking to him eagerly in the Hunnish tongue, thanked him over and over again with simple sincerity for the service which had been rendered to him. There was something noble

and frank in the manners of the boy; and as they went, he told his deliverer how the whole of that day's adventure had come about; how he had gone forth from the palace four or five days before to meet his father on the march homeward; and how in that day's hunting he had been stationed near the river's brink to watch for the smaller game as it was driven down to the water; and then, when the Urus appeared, how he had fancied he would please Attila by killing such a gigantic beast as that. He dwelt, too, on all he felt when he found his horse slain and himself at the mercy of the enraged monster, and Theodore experienced a double pride and pleasure in having saved so promising a child.

From time to time, as they rode on, the young Roman cast his eyes around, and listened somewhat anxiously for the coming of his own attendants, fearing that they might seek for him long in those dark woods. Cremera, however, he had seen amongst those who stood around when he rose from his contest with the wild bull; and he doubted not that the others would soon

gain some knowledge of the path he had taken, from those who had been left to bring away the body of his huge antagonist, as a trophy of the sylvan war.

He mentioned that he had missed his attendants, however, to his young companion Ernac, who laughed with boyish glee at his apprehensions, adding, "Oh, they will find you ere an hour be over. We Huns have ways of tracing our way through the thickest forests that you Romans do not understand;" and the proud emphasis which a mere boy laid upon "We Huns" showed Theodore how strong had become the national pride of the people under the victorious reign of Attila, though he could not but feel painfully, at the same time, the deep contempt which had fallen upon the once tremendous name of Rome. Ernac's anticipations, however, in regard to the attendants, did not prove false; for as the hunting train of the dark monarch rode on through the wilds, every now and then Theodore perceived the person of one of his own followers appearing between the trees, and taking their place amongst the rest.

Attila proceeded slowly, and as he rode on spoke to no one, except when he turned, and with an unwonted smile of fond paternal love addressed a few words to his rescued boy.

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

Approaching the central circle, which formed the abode of Attila, the monarch turned towards the young Roman, saying, “You follow me !”

and passing on, he led the way within the boundary.

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

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

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

He gave himself up to a fit of musing, regarding the events of the day, and the difference of his own feelings now, compared with what they had been but a few months before. At that time, when he at first met Attila — though he had experienced on beholding him, even before he was aware of his name and

station, sensations which he could not define — he had regarded the monarch of the Huns but as the talented chief of numerous barbarian hordes. Now he felt hourly creeping over him more and more of that same kind of awe with which the various nations under his command seemed uniformly to regard their chief; and Theodore tried to investigate in what consisted that peculiar power which was producing such an impression, gaining such an ascendancy over a mind not unconscious of vigour, activity, and brightness. He revolved the words, the conduct of Attila in every respect, and he could attribute this effect to nothing, were it not to the combination of many great and powerful qualities, seldom united in one man, but, as it were, all cemented together in the mind of Attila by a certain calm, deliberate sternness, which never left him except in the fiercest fury of the sanguinary strife. His every thought seemed stern; and the unshaken and extraordinary calmness which he possessed on all occasions, appeared to give him instant and perfect command over all the powerful talents which he possessed. There

could be no such thing as doubt or hesitation in his nature; and to that godlike certainty of purpose Theodore attributed the power over the minds of others which he so singularly possessed.

While he thus lay musing, forgetful of the scene around him, a sudden step woke him from his reverie; and the next moment, his former antagonist, Arderic, king of the Gepidæ, cast his huge bulk down upon the ground beside him. "Well, my friend—" he said, looking upon the countenance of Theodore, and running his eye over the limbs of the youth, manly and strong as they were, but still infinitely inferior in muscular strength to his own, "Well, my friend, when last we met it was in deadly strife; and now, in calm friendship, after our contest is over. I love the brave, whether they be enemies or not: and when the boy Ernac, who is not unlike thee in face and manners, told me thou wert here, I resolved to come and see thee, that I might discover, if I could, how one who seemed to me but a stripling could give me more trouble in the combat than a whole cohort of his countrymen. I cannot

understand it, even now, for thou art very young, and certainly not yet in strength mine equal. Thou art more active, perhaps, but that will not do every thing. However, let us not talk of strife! I come to eat and drink with thee, that the bond of hospitable union may be strong between us."

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

"I spared you not, good youth, for your own sake," replied Arderic, frankly; "I spared you for the sake of Attila, my friend. I would have slain you at the next blow, had it not been for him; for at that moment my blood was heated. You had, with your own hand, killed three of my people, and I had not time nor coolness to think, just then, that you were a brave youth, and a noble spirit, and that it were a pity to cut you off so soon. I may have thought so since; and from my heart I forgive you for thinning our ranks of two or

three of those startled foxes, who fled before you when you burst amongst them, as if they thought you must be some evil demon, to dare, with but two comrades, to attack a whole tribe."

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

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

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

"Oh, he will give you leave to go," replied Arderic. "Use him but nobly, and Attila is ever kind and generous. He will give you leave to go. When first he speaks to you, lead you the conversation to your wishes; and besides," added the chief, with a grave and warning look,

“ I think it may be better for you to be absent from this land for a brief space. Bleda, the brother of the monarch, loves you not. He is ambitious; and men scruple not to say, amongst the leaders of nations who obey and accompany the great King, that his hatred towards you proceeds from some idle prophecy, which combines the safety of Attila with thine. I say not that he would slay his brother; but he would little scruple, men affirm, to take away the life of one whose existence was important to the monarch’s safety.—I believe not in such prophecies,” added Arderic, after a pause of thought, —“ I believe not in such prophecies, but Attila, and Bleda, and many others do. They think that a man’s destiny is fixed and known long before his birth; that every little act which he performs is but one part of a great necessity; and that such being the case, the gods give intimation of what they have already determined to certain men peculiarly chosen for that purpose. I believe, on the contrary, that every thing takes place by accident; and that if the gods interfere at all with what we do, it is but to

drive us on again upon our way, as a herd does to a stray bull that wanders from the drove. I put no faith in such prophecies; and I see that even those who do, strive as much to have their own way against destiny, as those who think that there is no such thing. Now, Bleda would take your head to-morrow, in order to put his brother's fate out of joint; and Ellac, they say, has no great love for you, though he be Attila's son. But his hatred proceeds merely from overbearing pride. He loves his father, and would not injure him; but he likes not that Attila should favour or promote any one but himself."

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

"It is therefore, I say," answered Arderic, "that it would be well for you to be absent from this land for a short space. Bleda's ambition will not let him rest, though Attila thinks that

he has sated him with honours and with spoil. But the grave, and ambition, and avarice are insatiable. Bleda's ambition will not let him rest, I say; and these things will come to an end ere many months be over! But here come thine attendants and mine loaded with food, far more than we need, yet let us partake."

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

Attila was seated on a rude bench, and clothed in the simplest garments of his race; but yet there was still that indescribable calm dignity which, perhaps, had greater and more extraordinary effect from the harshness of his features and the want of accurate proportion in his limbs. He greeted Theodore kindly, and made him sit down beside him; and once more

touching upon the events of the morning, he spoke of the skill and dexterity, as well as strength and courage, which were required in hunting the wild bull, saying that few but the most powerful and the most daring of their own practised hunters were at all competent to meet that ferocious beast when brought to bay. He asked where Theodore had learned his skill in the chase; and the youth's answer, informing him how long he had remained with the family of his brother Bleda, threw the monarch into a fit of musing.

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

“Never, oh King,” replied the young Roman. “I plighted my word to thee that I would not.”

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

“My word, oh King,” answered Theodore, “whether directly or indirectly given, is never

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

"And why not write?" demanded Attila.

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

"Thou art wise and honest," rejoined Attila; "and thine honesty shall win full reliance. Hast thou never longed to see those once more

whom thou didst part from so sadly between the Margus and the Danube?"

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

"Thou shalt go," said Attila, "and taste the joy for which thou hast pined. Yet rest with me two days, in order that my brother Bleda

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

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

his honesty in dishonest times and amidst dishonest people, deserve that thy words should find attention."

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

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

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

"Unwisely answered, my son," said Attila: "but it matters not; I will send those with him who can protect him. Thou shalt lead back a troop of the Alani to their own land," he continued, turning to Theodore; "and in the

mean while keep near my person. Take thy place beside Edicon as we march to-morrow, and now sleep you well. Ernac, where is thine eldest brother? Has he left the camp already, after having so lately joined it?"

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

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

CHAP. V.

THE BITTER WRONG.

IN the audience hall of the rustic palace of Attila, towards the middle of the subsequent day, were assembled the chiefs of all the different nations he commanded; and at once strange and brilliant was the display of wild, but rich and picturesque attire which there presented itself. The gold and silver of conquered nations, the trinkets and precious stones of many a plundered palace, were mingled with the shining steel and rich furs of the conquerors; and scarcely could the luxurious court of those famed eastern monarchs, whose effeminate splendour had become a by-word in the world, exceed in the blaze of gems and gold the hall of the dark monarch of the Huns. But in the midst of all, and distinguished from all by the perfect simplicity of his garb, sat Attila himself, with his large hand

resting on the iron hilt of his broad heavy sword. Kings of an hundred different nations stood around, gazing with awe and veneration upon that dark plain man, and acknowledging in every look and gesture the mighty influence of superior intellect. Beside these, on either hand were placed the many sons, and the favourite friends of the monarch: amongst the last appeared Onegisus, Edicon, and Theodore; and a number of slaves and attendants, covered with barbarian ornaments, filled up the rest of the wide space.

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

“Art thou of what thy nation calls of patrician rank?” demanded Attila, when the ambassador, with his forehead almost bending to the

ground, had approached within two steps of the monarch.

“Alas, no,” he answered; “I am but the humblest slave of Attila the king.”

“If thou art my slave, thou art happier than I believed thee to be,” replied Attila; “for to be the slave of a slave is a humbler rank than any that we know on this side of the Danube. Yet such thou art, if thou art the servant of Theodosius. How dares he,” continued the King, fixing his keen black eyes fiercely upon him, “how dares he to send any but the noblest in his land to treat with him who sets his foot upon his neck? ’Tis well for thee that thou art but a servant, and that therefore we pardon thee, otherwise hadst thou died the death, for daring to present thyself before me. But now, get thee gone! — Yet stay! Edicon, we will that thou shouldst accompany him back to the vicious city of Theodosius, the womanly king of an effeminate nation. Thou shalt go into his presence and say unto him, ‘How is it that thou hast been so insolent as to send any of blood less noble than thine own, even to lick

the dust beneath the feet of Attila? As thou hast so done, thou shalt be exiled again by the same hand that has smitten thee; for Attila, the King, thy master and mine, bids thee prepare a place for him.' Thus shalt thou speak — in these words and no others?"

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

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

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

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

"Fortune attend him," said the monarch;

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

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

within him, Theodore could hardly regret the prospect of a struggle which might divide and occupy the enemies of his native country; but still he felt a degree of sorrowful regret that all the high and noble qualities of the barbarian king should not have been enough to win the love, or overawe the ambition, of his inferior brother.

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

Whatever might be the feelings with which

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

Hope, like a kind parent, reaches up the cliff and gathers for us the flowers long ere our own slow childish efforts can attain them; and Theodore was already revelling in joys

which were yet afar, in that vague uncertain future. He spent the day in happiness; and after a night given up to waking dreams, far brighter than even the fair magician, Fancy, could have called up in the phantasmagoria of sleep, he rose with the first grey streak of dawn, and set out to realise the visions.

It was a dull and heavy morning, with the white veil of clouds rolled round the summits of the distant mountains, and flying showers passing frequently over the plains; but as the young Roman proceeded, at the head of near two hundred of the Alan horsemen, whom Attila, on the pretence of sending them to their own homes, had given him in fact as a guard, his heart was too light and joyful to feel or know that the brow of nature was overcast. His eye might roll over the mountains plunged in mists; or over the forests, where the pattering rain was seen falling amidst the autumnal leaves; or over the plain and along the meadows, where a hazy whiteness rested a few feet above the general level: but the mind's eye was in other lands and on other scenes; and, for the

time, even his corporeal faculties seemed to correspond with the mental vision alone. It is scarcely too much to say that he knew not the morning was not fine.

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

Looking round as he was about to spring

upon his horse, he missed a face that was seldom absent from his side. "Where is Cremera?" he demanded of those who stood near.

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

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

could not help feeling it extraordinary that one so quick and rapid in all his decisions as the Arab was, should not long before have discovered that the whole troop had gone on, and overtaken them as they rode.

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

Thus they had proceeded for more than an hour and a half, though they rode much more quickly than before; and they had nearly reached the spot whence they set forth in the morning, when Theodore heard one of his followers in the wood, give the peculiar shout which was understood to express a desire, for

all the companions of him who uttered it, to halt. The next instant, the man appeared at the verge of the wood, beckoning eagerly to the young Roman.

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

With a heart full of grief and indignation, Theodore approached the body with his com-

* Crucifixion, which we have reason to believe one of the most agonising kinds of death, was one of the common punishments amongst the Huns.

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

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

by a scoff; and Theodore could hear the name of Bleda pronounced as authority sufficient for the act they had committed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

At length they began to pass amongst the houses, and Theodore became convinced that he had not been mistaken. All was

quiet as they rode on, for the early Huns had betaken themselves to their dwellings; and it was only as he passed along before the wide rambling building which formed the dwelling of Bleda that Theodore heard the sounds of mirth and rude revelry proceeding from that apartment which he knew to be the hall of the banquet. He was led along to the farther extremity of the building, and thrust into a chamber which had evidently been destined for a place of confinement. It, like the house, was all of wood, but no windows, except a row of small apertures near the roof, appeared to admit air or light; and across the outside of the door through which the prisoner had entered, was cast, as his captors departed, a huge beam of wood, which would have defied the strength of a Hercules to shake it from within.

Theodore was left alone; for the two Huns who had been captured with him, and had been brought there at the same time, were placed in some other chamber, perhaps from a fear that they might assist him in escaping. All was darkness, for neither food nor lamp was given

to the prisoner; and, seating himself upon the rude bench which he found at one side of the room, Theodore spent the succeeding hours in momentary anticipation of death, and in thoughts and regrets which added fresh gall to the cup of bitterness.

Few were the sounds which disturbed his painful reveries; for though from time to time the roar of barbarian merriment echoed through the long passages, and found its way even to the lonely chamber in which he was immersed, yet it came faint and softened to his ear, and at length, after rising to a louder pitch than before, suddenly ceased, and all was still. Theodore listened to hear if those sounds would be renewed; but deep silence seemed to reign over all the household, and for two hours every thing remained perfectly quiet.

At length a streak of light appeared above and below the door, and a low murmuring sound reached the sharpened ear of the prisoner. "It is a fit hour for death," he thought; and the next moment he heard the heavy beam grate slowly and gently against the walls, as it

was removed from across the door. The door itself was opened cautiously, and the deformed head and shoulders of the negro jester, Zercon, were thrust into the room. In one hand he held a lamp, and with the fore finger of the other raised to his lips seemed to enjoin perfect silence.

He held up the lamp ere he entered fully, and looked round the room with careful attention, as if he expected to see some other tenant besides Theodore. Then, advancing rapidly, he whispered in Greek, "The Lady Neva knows of your being here; I heard that you were taken, while I was in the hall, where her fierce father was drinking; and as I had found out by her face, when he talked of waylaying you yesterday, how it went with her young heart, I told her all directly, and she is coming to save you: but she sent me first to see if any of the guards remained with you, for the poor buffoon can venture, in his folly, upon things that the clumsy wise man would spoil if he touched — Hush! I hear her in the passage, or somebody else;" and he advanced and looked

out at the door, which he had closed behind him as he had entered.

The next moment he made a sign with his hand — there was a light footfall — the door was pushed farther open, and with an eager step the beautiful daughter of Bleda entered the room, and stood before him she loved. She was very pale, but that might proceed from apprehension ; and yet there was a devoted determination in those tender eyes, which told that death itself would have no terrors if it lay in the path to save the young Roman. She also carried a lamp in one hand, but in the other she bore a naked dagger. Ere she spoke a word, she set down the lamp upon the ground, and cut with a rapid hand the thongs which bound the prisoner's arms.

“I knew,” she said at length, “I knew that the time would come when I should save you. Oh, Theodore ! how I have prayed for this hour ! — But I must not waste it, now it has arrived. Zercon ! quick ! see why that tardy slave, Ahac, has not brought a horse. He would not betray me, surely. But sooner than

that he should deliver the Roman again to death, drive thy dagger into his heart. I bid thee do it, and I will abide what comes !”

The negro hastened to obey; and Neva gazed upon the countenance of him whom she was risking so much to save, with one of those looks of deep, unutterable affection, which the very hopelessness of the passion from which it sprung purified, dignified, sanctified, even in its strong intensity. The next moment, as Theodore was pouring forth his thanks to an ear that seemed scarcely to hear them — so deeply was she occupied with the emotions of her own bosom — the sound of a horse’s feet was heard, led gently forward; and a smile of triumphant pleasure played upon Neva’s lip.

In another instant, however, it changed, as she thought that horse was to bear him away, perhaps, for ever. The tears rose in her blue eyes, ran shining through the black lashes that fringed them, and fell upon her cheek; and for one moment she hid her face upon the young Roman’s bosom, and he pressed her gently,

gratefully in his arms, whispering words of comfort and of thanks. But, suddenly raising her head, she turned it away, while her hand still lingered in his, saying, "Go! go! Tarry not longer. I have saved you — that is enough — I am happy. To know that I have saved you is enough happiness for me through life. Go! go! every moment is precious!"

Theodore raised the hand he held to his lips, pressed upon it one kiss of deep gratitude, dropt it, and quitted the chamber which had been his prison. At the door stood Zercon, who led him quickly forth to a spot where, amongst the grass, so that his feet might not be heard, stood a horse, held by one of the slaves, whom Theodore had seen when he was there before.

"I could have wished it had been my own horse," he said, speaking to Zercon.

"Your own horse will never bear any one more," replied the negro: "they slew him within an hour after they had brought him hither."

Theodore could have wept; but, without re-

ply, he sprang upon the horse, and shook his hand towards the dwelling of Bleda.

“Follow yon star,” continued Zercon, pointing to one near the pole, “and ere morning thou shalt be among the mountains that overhang the dwelling of Attila.”

“I thank thee,” replied Theodore, speaking to the negro — “I thank thee, my friend: the time may come when I can show thee my gratitude.” Thus saying, he shook the bridle, and urged the horse on at full speed, following exactly the course which had been pointed out to him. Ere morning, he beheld the waters of the Mariscus stretching out before him; but knowing that the horses of the Huns possessed, either by natural instinct, or had acquired by constant habit, the power of distinguishing what rivers and what places they could swim across, he rode the beast rapidly to the bank, and then left the bridle upon his neck, in order that he might take to the stream, or not, as he pleased. The horse, however, without any sign of disinclination, ran down the bank,

and waded into the water. After pausing for a moment to drink, he advanced still farther, and then, with a sudden plunge, began to swim, though the stream was running somewhat rapidly. The deep water was of no great extent, and the horse's hoofs soon struck the ground. The bank was soon gained, and, apparently refreshed with the cool wave, the swift horse bore the young Roman rapidly on his way.

The dawn was just breaking when he arrived at the foot of the hills, and by the time he had reached the top, the broad light of day was shining over all the world. He saw, by one of the peaks to the south, that he was several miles farther up in the chain than the spot where he had before passed in the neighbourhood of the two hermits. Pausing to breathe his horse, he looked over the plain behind him, and could see, at the distance of several leagues, what appeared to be a strong body of horsemen, following rapidly on the very track he had taken. There was no time to be lost ; and, hurrying on, he reached the plains at the foot of the hill, nor paused again till the flagging powers of his horse

obliged him to stop in order to give the animal food and repose.

He could well afford to rest, however; for even if the horsemen he had seen were really in pursuit of him, yet the distance at which they had appeared from the foot of the mountains, and the difficulty of climbing those mountains themselves, promised to afford him at least four hours of open time. His horse fed, and then lay down to rest amongst the long grass, and Theodore, in the latter respect at least, followed its example; knowing how small an object might be discerned from the tops of the mountains in that wide uncovered plain, and trusting that, while hidden by the grass, his enemies, if they came sooner than he expected, might miss his track, and perhaps turn back disappointed. He kept his eye fixed, however, upon the ridge of the hills; and well it was he did so, for, having taken, perhaps, an easier path than he had done, his enemies did begin to appear upon the summits in less than two hours after he had reached the base.

At first they could scarcely be distinguished

from the rocks amidst which they came forth on the top of the hills ; but soon the number of moving objects, which he beheld at one particular point, showed the young Roman that as yet they had followed but too successfully. For a time the pursuers seemed to hesitate whether they should proceed any farther, and he could see them lingering during several minutes, hanging like a dark cloud upon the ridge of the mountain. At length they began evidently to descend, and that moment Theodore sprang upon his feet, roused his horse, which seemed to have fallen asleep, and leaping into the saddle, galloped on towards a wood that lay at the distance of three or four miles before him.

As he came near, he beheld several small huts gathered together ; and, approaching them, he resolved to see if he could procure a fresh horse in exchange for the weary one which bore him. The name of Attila obtained what no bribe could have gained. The head of the little tribe, leading out his own horse, placed the rude bridle in Theodore's hand ; and, once more hurrying on his way, the young Roman,

ere night fell, saw the mountains and the woods that swept round the dwelling of the King, and heard the rushing sound of the near Tibiscus.

It was night when he arrived at the wide-spread village; but all was peaceful within, and no guard or sentinel impeded his way even to the porticos of the monarch's lowly abode. As he alighted, and approached the inner gates of the building, he was met by one of Attila's slaves, whom he had seen more than once before, and who now told him that the King had gone to rest.

“He feared that you were slain,” continued the man, “for many of those who went hence with you but a few days ago returned with speed this day, and declared that you had been put to death. They are now at the dwelling where you were lodged before, and will gladly see you living, for they thought you dead.”

The young Roman took his way to the house he had formerly inhabited; and the unaffected joy displayed by the rude Huns who had been given him as attendants, on seeing him again

in life, compensated for some bitter pangs. Attila's slaves brought him provisions and wine, but he was too weary to enjoy food, and, after a short and slight repast, he cast himself down to rest.

The image of his faithful Cremera, however, rose up before his eyes, and for some time banished sleep. His noble horse, too, though less in the scale of regret, was not without its share of painful recollection. "The two last friends," he thought, "who accompanied me from my native home to this barbarian land, have in one day been taken from me, and I am alone — without one being near me who has any memories in common with mine own." Fatigue at length prevailed, and he slept. Early on the following morning he was roused by a summons to the presence of the King, and at the gate of the palace he beheld a numerous train of horsemen, waiting as if prepared for a journey.

Attila himself was seated beneath the porch, and beside him stood Arderic and another kingly leader, whom Theodore afterwards learned to

be Valamir, king of the Ostrogoths, with several other chiefs of inferior power. The brows of all were clouded, with the exception of that of Attila, which wore the same stern, calm aspect that so seldom quitted it.

“Thou hast been impeded on thy way, my son,” said the monarch, slowly, “one of thy faithful followers slain, and thou thyself carried away to the dwelling of my unwise brother, Bleda; so some who returned hither reported to me yesterday. Did he set thee free, after having, as he thought, sufficiently insulted his brother? Or didst thou escape?”

“I escaped, oh King! during the night,” replied Theodore; but not knowing what might be the conduct of Attila, he refrained from telling how his escape had been accomplished, lest the share which Neva and Zercon had had therein might reach the ears of Bleda. “I escaped during the night, and have been keenly pursued, even across the mountains.”

“Attila rolled his dark eyes round to the faces of all the different leaders near, with a slight

compression of the lips, which marked that he was moved more than usual.

“And thy faithful Arab is dead, then; is it not so?” demanded the king.

“Alas! so it is, oh King!” replied Theodore: “nailed by the two hands to two separate trees, I found him pierced with arrows by the banks of the river, some two hours’ journey on this side of the first ford. There any one may see him, for they have denied him even the shelter of the grave.”

Attila folded his arms upon his wide chest, and gazed for a moment upon Theodore in silence: “Wouldst thou still pursue thy journey,” he asked at length, “after such misfortunes on the way?”

“If it may be pursued at all with life, I would fain pursue it,” answered Theodore.

“It may be pursued with safety,” said the monarch. “In thy case, Attila’s protection has been twice insulted — it shall not be so a third time. None but a brother dared do what has been done; but even a brother has gone too

far. If thou wouldst go on thy way, join, with thy followers, in less than an hour, those warriors who stand around the gate. They will conduct thee by the higher country to the land of thy kindred; and I swear by mine own heart, that those who stay you, going or returning, were it even by a willow wand across your path, I will smite from the face of the earth, and lay their dwellings level with the sand, and sell their wives and children unto slavery. Now make ready quickly, and proceed!"

Theodore failed not to obey; and in as short a space of time as possible, he was once more upon horseback, and on his way towards the west.

CHAP. VI.

THE MEETING OF THE PARTED.

ACROSS wide plains, through deep solitudes, amidst dim woods, over gigantic mountains, by the banks of the stream and the torrent and the lake, amongst the occasional ruins left upon the footsteps of ancient civilisation and the scattered villages of barbarian hordes, Theodore once more pursued his way. Every kind of scene but that of the cultivated city met his eye, and every kind of weather that the changeful autumn of a northern land can display accompanied him on his path. The splendid October sunshine, beaming clear and kind upon the earth, like the tempered smile of a father looking in mellow ripeness of years upon his rising offspring; the flitting shadows of the heavy clouds as they swept by over the landscape, resembling the

gloomy cares and apprehensions which sometimes cross the brightest moments of enjoyment ; the dull misty deluge pouring down from morning until night, without interval or cessation, shutting out all prospects, and promising no brighter time, like the hopeless existence of but too many of the sons of toil ; the brief and angry thunder-storm, rending the stoutest trees, like the fierce passing of war or civil contention, all visited him by turns, as he journeyed onwards from the banks of the Tibiscus, till he once more joined the Danube, at a spot where, shrunk to a comparatively insignificant stream, it flowed on between the countries now called Bavaria and Austria.

It was on one of those dim uncertain days, when all distant objects are shut out from the sight, that he crossed the river a little above its junction with the Inn, and entered upon the open country of Bavaria. Nothing was to be seen but the flat plain which stretches onward along the banks of the Inn ; and when, after halting for the night amidst some rude huts, where the people seemed to speak the language

of the Goths, he recommenced his journey on the following morning, the same dull cheerless prospect was all that presented itself, stretched upon the grey back-ground of broad unvaried cloud. His companions had now been reduced to twenty, by the larger party having left him as soon as he was free from danger ; and none but his own peculiar attendants accompanied him, except three officers of the household of Attila, sent with authority from that mighty and far-feared monarch to demand a free passage for the young Roman through whatever countries he might have to traverse. It was one of these officers — who took care to show all kindly reverence towards a youth who stood so high in the favour of the King — that now, pointing forward to a little stream which flowed on to join the Inn, informed the young Roman that along its banks was settled the nation which he came to seek.

“ And is this,” thought Theodore, “ this bleak wilderness the destined habitation of my Ildica, nurtured in the lap of ease and civilisation ? Is this flat unmeaning plain, bounded by

a grey cloud, all that is to greet her eyes, after the splendours of the Adriatic shore, and the marvellous beauty of Salona?" And with a deep sigh he thought of the regretted past.

Ere he had ridden on a quarter of an hour longer, however, a light wind sprung up; and rising, like a curtain drawn slowly up from before some picture of surpassing beauty, the veil of clouds was lifted to the south, displaying as it rose, robed in the magic purple of the mountain air, the wild but splendid scenery of the Bavarian Tyrol.

A few moments more brought the young Roman to a congregation of small wooden houses, not far from the first gentle slopes, that served to blend the plain with the highlands. A fair girl, with whose face Theodore felt as if he could claim kindred, paused, with a basket of milk in her hand, to gaze upon the troop of horsemen who were passing by, but without any sign of fear. Theodore asked her some question concerning the road, and she replied lightly and gaily, with the milkmaid's careless glee, speaking the pure Alan tongue, in accents

that made the young Roman's heart thrill again to hear. He rode gladly on his way, assured by those tones that he was at length once more in the same land with her he loved. That land, he knew, was of no very great extent, and therefore he had not any cause to anticipate a long and painful search; but still the eager thirst with which young affection pants towards its object, made him anxious not to lose a single moment in any unnecessary delay; and he determined, as they wound onward towards the little capital of the mountain tribe, to inquire, wherever he came, for the dwelling of the Roman family, whose arrival in the land, he doubted not, had excited no small rumour and attention.

There remained yet two hours to sunset, when, passing through some gentle hills, Theodore suddenly found himself on the banks of a small but beautiful lake, surrounded on three sides by the mountains. The shore, at the spot where he stood, was low and sandy, with here and there a fringe of long reeds, mingling the water with the land, but on all the other sides

the banks were more abrupt. From the lake up to the very sky, on those three sides stretched the upland, rising in different ranges, like Titan steps whereby to scale the heavens, but divided at different angles by intervening valleys, up which was seen the long blue perspective of interminable hills beyond. The first step of that mountain throne, carpeted as if with green velvet, by pastures still unembrowned and rich, was covered with sheep and cattle feeding in peace. Beyond that appeared a range, clothed with glowing woods of oak, and elm, and beech, filled with the more timid and gentle inhabitants of the sylvan world; while above, tenanted by the wolf, the fox, and other beasts of prey, stretched wide the region of the pine and fir; and, towering over all, grey, cold, and awful, rose the peaks of primeval granite, with nothing but the proud eagle soaring between them and heaven. Below, the lake, unruffled by a breeze, lay calm and still, offering a mirror to the beauty of the scene, where every line of picturesque loveliness was reflected without a change, and every hue of

all the varied colouring around, from the rich brown of the autumnal woods, to the purple of the distant mountains and the floods of amber and of rose, that evening was pouring along the glowing sky.

Upon the lower range of hills many a wooden cottage, neat and clean, was to be seen ; and several villages, peeping from the first woods, varied the scene with the pleasant aspect of intelligent life ; and as, winding round the left shore, the young Roman and his companions advanced towards a spot at the other end of the lake where they proposed to pass the night, a thousand new beauties opened out upon their sight. Theodore gazed around, thinking, that here indeed he could spend his days in peace ; and, perhaps, he might envy the shepherd boys that looked down upon him from low flat-topped hills, under which he passed, or the women and girls, who, sitting by the cattle at pasture, roused themselves for a moment from their pleasant idleness to mark the troop of horsemen passing by.

At length, upon the verge of a smooth mea-

dow which covered the summit of a steep green hill at the foot of the higher mountains—jutting out, in the form of a small promontory above the road he was pursuing, with the green edge cutting sharp upon the blue mountain air beyond—he beheld a group of people gathered together, apparently enjoying the evening sunshine. Neither sheep nor cattle were near; and though the dark lines of the figures, diminished by distance, were all that Theodore could see as they stood on the clear bright back-ground, yet in those very lines, and in the graceful attitudes which the figures assumed as they stood or sat, there was something so Grecian and classical, so unlike the forms offered by a group of barbarians, that the heart of the young Roman felt a thrill of hope which made it beat high.

Suddenly reining in his horse, he stopped to gaze; the glad hope grew into more joyful certainty; and, without farther thought or hesitation, carried away by feelings which refused control, he urged his horse at the gallop up the steep side of the hill, nor paused, even for a

moment, till he had reached the summit. The Huns gazed with surprise from below, and beheld him, when he had arrived at the top, spring from his horse in the midst of the group, which had caught his attention, and with many an embrace and many a speaking gesture, receive his welcome to the bosom of ancient affection.

“ He has found his home !” they said to one another, as they saw his reception ; and, winding round by a more secure path, they followed up to the summit of the hill, perceiving, as they ascended, a number of beautiful mountain dwellings congregated in the gorge of a ravine behind.

Oh who can tell what were in the mean time the emotions which agitated the group above ! To Theodore it was the fruition of a long cherished hope. He held his Ildica in his arms, he pressed her to his heart, he saw those dark and lustrous eyes, swimming in the light of love’s delicious tears, gaze at him with the full passionate earnestness of unimpaired affection ; he tasted once more the breath of those sweet lips,

he felt once more the thrilling touch of that soft hand. She was paler than when he had left her, but in her countenance there was—or seemed in his eyes to be—a crowning charm gained since he last had seen it. There was in its expression a depth of feeling, an intensity of thought, which, though softened and sweetened by the most womanly tenderness and youthful innocence which human heart ever possessed, added much to the transcendent beauty that memory had so often recalled. In her form, too, there had been a slight change, which had rendered the symmetry perfect without brushing away one girlish grace. Flavia, too, had a part in his glad feelings, as with the full measure of maternal tenderness she held him in her arms, and blessed the day which gave him back to those who loved him. Eudochia, also, over whose head the passing months had fled, maturing her youthful beauty, clung round her brother, and with eyes of joyful welcome gazed silently up in his face.

Ammian was not there : gone, they said, to hunt the izzard and wild goat amongst the

highest peaks of the mountain ; but the slaves and freedmen who had followed Flavia still, through every change of fortune drew closer round, and with smiling lips and sparkling eyes greeted the young Roman on his return amongst them. It was not long ere his attendants joined him; and as there was much to be inquired and much to be told on all parts, Flavia speedily led the way to the dwelling which she had obtained in the land of the Alani; and Theodore, with Ildica's hand clasped in his, and Eudochia hanging to his arm, followed to the little group of houses which filled the gorge above.

Oh what a change from the palace of Diocletian ! the marble columns, the resplendent walls, the sculptured friezes, the rich wrought capitals ! All was of woodwork, neat, clean, and picturesque : spacious withal, and convenient, though simple and unassuming. Within, Flavia, and her children and attendants, had laboured hard to give it the appearance of a Roman dwelling, trying by the presence of old accustomed objects to cheat memory and banish

some of her sad train of regrets ; nor had they been unsuccessful in producing the appearance they desired, for all that they had brought from Salona, and which, under the safe escort of the Huns, had been conveyed from the neighbourhood of Margus thither, enabled them to give an air of Roman splendour to the interior of their rude habitation.

In the village Theodore's attendants found an abode, while he himself, once more in the midst of all he now loved on earth, if we except Ammian, sat down to the evening meal, and listened eagerly to the details of every thing that had occurred to Flavia and her family since he had parted with them on the verge of the barbarian territory. Their journey had been long and fatiguing, the matron said, but safe and uninterrupted, and their reception amongst the simple mountaineers had been kind and tender. The choice of a dwelling had been left to themselves ; and though the capital of the tribe was situated in the valley of the Inn, they had fixed upon the spot where they now were for their abode, as one less sub-

ject to the passage of strangers, or to the inroads of inimical neighbours.

The most important part of the tale, however, was to come: scarcely a month ere Theodore had arrived, ambassadors from Valentinian had presented themselves at the court of the king of the Alani, and Flavia and her family had held themselves for a time in even deeper retirement than before; but to their surprise, one morning the envoys appeared at their dwelling by the lake, and the Roman lady found, with no slight astonishment, that Valentinian was already aware of her residence amongst the Alani. The mission of the ambassadors to the barbarian chief was one of small import, but to Flavia they bore a message from the emperor of unwonted gentleness. He invited her to fix her abode in the western empire; promised her protection against all her enemies, and full justice in regard to all her claims; nor could she doubt from the whole tenor of his message that, with the usual enmity of rival power, even when lodged in kindred hands, whoever was looked upon as an enemy by

Theodosius was regarded as a friend by Valentinian. Flavia, however, without absolutely refusing to accept the fair offers of the emperor, had assigned as a motive for delaying to reply, that she expected daily to receive tidings from the son of Paulinus.

Theodore mused at these tidings; but Eudochia, who with childless thoughtlessness looked upon all that happened to themselves as of very little import whenever it was over, now pressed eagerly to hear the adventures of her brother since they had parted, and Ildica also, with a deeper interest than common curiosity, looked up in his face with eyes that seemed to say, "I have waited long, beloved, that you might be satisfied first, but, oh, make me a sharer now in all that has occurred to one far dearer than myself."

Theodore needed no entreaty, but began his story, and with minute detail related all that had occurred to him during the last few months. Was there any part of that history which he did not tell, any of the events that had chequered his fate, which he omitted in his narration? There

were ! A feeling of tenderness, of interest, of gratitude, kept him silent upon some points of the history of Bleda's daughter. He spoke of Neva, indeed ; he told how she had nursed him in sickness, and how she had delivered him from captivity ; but he could not, and he did not, tell, while many an ear was listening, that she had bestowed the first love of her young heart upon one who could not return it.

Flavia hearkened to the tale, and at that part of it which related to Bleda's daughter, her eyelids fell a little over her eyes. It was not that she doubted Theodore, for there was a simplicity and candour in all he said, which admitted no suspicion ; but she deemed how it was, and for the sake of the poor girl she was grieved that it should be so. Ildica, possessed but by one feeling, suspected and divined nothing ; her only comment was, as she heard of his danger and escape, " Oh, why was it not I, to whom the means of saving you were given ? "

" Thank God, my Ildica," replied Theodore, " that you were far from such scenes and such dangers." But as he was proceeding to con-

clude his tale, there were quick steps heard without, and the voice of Ammian singing gaily, as he returned successful from his mountain sport.

CHAP. VII.

THE INTERVAL OF HAPPINESS.

HITHERTO we have given nearly a connected narrative; but now it may become necessary to proceed sometimes in detached scenes, leaving the mind of the reader to fill up the obvious chain of intervening facts.

Theodore and Ildica sat alone by the banks of the lake, with their eyes fixed upon the rippling waters, that came whispering up nearly to their feet; and they gained, without knowing it, a tone of calm repose, in the midst of their hearts' thrilling enjoyment, from the tranquillity of the scene around, and the bright untroubled softness of a fine autumn day. If, when they met on the preceding evening, Theodore had been moved by joy, such as his heart had never known before, Ildica's had been still

more agitated, for delight had been carried to its fullest height by surprise. Theodore had come thither with expectation and hope as the harbinger of gratification; but to Ildica, the joy of his coming had burst suddenly forth, like the May-day sun, when he scatters the clouds of morning from his path. Neither, however, the youth nor the maiden, had been able to pause, and — if I may use so strange a term — *enjoy their joy*, during the first evening after his arrival. The mind of each had been full of whirling images of pleasure, but with forms scarcely definite. Now, however, as they sat by the side of that calm lake, amidst those glorious mountains, with a sky clear, but not burning, above their heads, and the fresh stillness of the early morning pervading all the air, the solemn tranquillity of the scene sunk into their souls, and bade their mutual thoughts flow on in peace.

The history of all external events which had befallen them had been told, it is true, by Flavia and Theodore, and many a little trait had been added by Eudochia, Ammian, and Ildica herself; but still she and her lover had both a long his-

tory to tell of thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears, of far deeper interest to each other than things that might seem of greater importance. Ildica towards Theodore had no thought concealed. No idle fear of lessening the value of her love by displaying it, put an unnatural bar upon the pure feelings of her heart: not a doubt of his generous construction of all that she said fettered her words, or embarrassed the expression of her thoughts; and she poured forth, without fear or hesitation, the tale of all she had felt since she left him in the hands of the Huns; how she had wept, and how she had feared; how she had daily looked for some tidings from him, or some change in her own fate; and how she had consoled herself with the remembrance of the extraordinary power he seemed to have obtained over the barbarian king.

The telling of that tale, now that the dangers were over and the fears gone by, was in itself a happiness; and, mingled with many a look of love and accent of affection, and many a tender caress, Ildica's narrative of all that she had felt proceeded, till, in the end, she had to

relate how, on the very preceding night, while sitting on the little promontory with Eudochia and her mother and the slaves, there had been something in the situation, which — though unlike in all the features of the landscape, though the air was colder, and the mountains nearer, and the sky of a paler hue — which recalled the lovely Dalmatian shore to her mind : and how, in the magic glass of memory had risen up the mound of cypresses and the bay of Salona, and the glorious sunset, and all the objects and all the feelings of that well-remembered evening when her lover had last returned from the city of the emperors ; and how, at those thoughts, the unbidden tears were rising even to overflowing in her eyes, when she saw a horseman suddenly gallop up the hill, and wild hopes and joyful presentiments had rushed through her heart, and taken from her all power of speech or motion, till she was once more clasped in his arms.

Theodore, too, had his tale to tell ; and now, to the ear of her he loved, it was not less full or less candid than her own had been. He gave

her a picture of all his thoughts in every situation through which he had passed, and her own unconscious questions soon brought the narrative towards Neva. But Theodore felt that he could trust in Ildica, and he told her all; and, with his arm circling her waist, he pressed her more tenderly, more closely, to his bosom, while he spoke of the love of another, as if he sought thereby to express how much more dear she had become to his heart under every change and every circumstance.

Neither did he do the daughter of the barbarian chief the injustice of breathing the tale of her unhappy love, without adding every pure and noble trait which had shone out in her conduct; and Ildica, who had listened with a beating heart, but not a doubting mind, pressed her eyes, in which were some tears, upon Theodore's bosom, saying, "Poor girl, I am sorry for her! I wonder not at her loving you, Theodore. It is but too natural she should; and oh, I am sure that her love for one so much above any being that she ever saw before, will last, unhappily for herself, through all

her life. She will compare every one with you, and every one will fall short. I am sorry for her, beloved: and yet, Theodore, yet I could not share your love with any one; I could not part with the smallest portion of that treasure for a world. See, how selfish and miserly I have become!”

“None can ever take the slightest portion from thee, my Ildica,” replied Theodore: “from infancy to death, there shall be but one image which shall fill my heart. But to do poor Neva justice, she seeks not to rob my Ildica of that which is Ildica’s own. She would not share in a heart that is given to another, Ildica, even if she could; and as, from all that has passed, from her father’s hatred towards me, and the injuries he has done me, it is impossible that Neva and I should ever meet again, I trust that she will forget feelings which were suddenly raised, checked almost in their birth, and have no food on which to feed and prolong their existence—I trust she will forget——”

“Never, Theodore! never!” cried Ildica; “such feelings are not to be forgotten. She

will see none like you ; but even if she did, she would fancy none she saw your equal. The memory of having saved you from death, too, will perpetuate her love — ay, the memory of that action, and the memory of her love, will go down together with her to the tomb, embalming and preserving each other.”

“ I trust not, my Ildica, I trust not,” he replied.

“ Oh, Theodore,” she answered, “ were I absent from you for long years, separated from you even by impassable barriers, would you love me less? could you forget our love?”

“ No, certainly not,” replied Theodore; “ but our love is mutual, and full of mutual hopes. Her love is hopeless and unreturned; and I trust she will forget it.”

“ Such may be the case with man,” answered Ildica. “ Hopeless and unreturned, his love may, perhaps, seek another object. Woman loves but once, and never forgets, my Theodore. My heart tells it me, even now; and though in such things I have, of course, but little skill, yet I feel and know, that time, absence, despair

itself, could never make me forget my love for thee. The time must come when remembrance shall be extinguished in the grave, and the fine lines, traced by the diamond style of love on the tablets of the spirit, may be hidden for a while beneath the dust of the tomb; but to that cold dwelling-house shall the unfaded recollection go down with me; and when I waken again from the sleep of death, the memory of my love shall waken with me—I feel—I know it will;” and as she spoke, she raised her eyes to heaven, while the rays of the morning light danced in their liquid lustre, as if they, too, were of kindred with the sky.

Theodore pressed her to his heart, and long and sweet was the communion that followed; but we cannot, we will not, farther dwell upon things that those who have loved truly will understand without our telling, and that those who have never so loved cannot comprehend at all. Let them be sacred! those holy feelings of the pure and high-toned heart; those sweet, ennobling emotions of the unpolluted soul. Let them be sacred! those sensations, intense yet timid, pure

and unalloyable as the diamond, as firm, as bright, as unspotted; but which, like a precious jewel that baser minds would ever fain take from us, are wisely concealed by those who possess them from the gaze of the low and the unfeeling. We seek not to display—we would not if we could—all the finer shades, the tenderer emotions, of the love of Theodore and Ildica. We have raised the veil enough, to show how they did love, and we will raise it no farther.

The days of his stay passed in visions of happiness to Ildica and himself, a long dreamy lapse of exquisite delight. Beyond each other, and the few dear beings around them, what was the world to them? The limits of that valley were the limits of their thoughts; and, whether they sailed on the calm bosom of the lake, or climbed the giant mountains round about, or wandered through the rustling woods, or sat upon the shore and watched the tiny billows of that miniature sea, the thoughts of the two lovers were only of each other, though the lovely scene, mountain, and stream, and woods, and lakes, and meadows, mingled insensibly with their own

dream of happiness, heightened the colouring of their hopes, and, in return, received a brighter hue itself. Sweet, oh, how sweet! were the hours, and yet how rapidly they flew; till at length, when they rose one morning and gazed forth, a wreath of snow was seen hanging upon the peaks of the mountains — not alone upon those higher summits, on whose everlasting ice the summer sun shone vainly through his longest, brightest hours, but on those lower hills which the day before had risen up in the brown veil of the autumnal forest or the green covering of grass, or the grey nakedness of the native stone. It was the signal for Theodore to depart; and then came the hours, ere he set out, of melancholy and of gloom.

Those hours, however, were broken by many a long and anxious consultation. The offered hospitality and protection of Valentinian had yet to be considered, for it was a proposal which, if even not accepted at once, both Theodore and Flavia judged might prove of great utility at an after period. No one could tell, either what changes might take place in the positions of the

barbarian nations, or what might be the final result of the victories and successes of Attila himself. Where he might next turn his arms was a question which none even of his own court could solve; and while it was evident to all, that a victorious and devastating excursion against the eastern empire was by no means the ulterior purpose of his powerful and ambitious mind, yet no one could divine what was the end proposed, or whither the pursuit might lead. Under these circumstances, to have a place of refuge open against the storm of war was always a blessing; and Theodore strongly counselled Flavia to despatch messengers to the emperor, charged with thanks, and such presents as circumstances permitted her to send; not exactly accepting the offer of asylum he had made, but expressing a purpose of taking advantage thereof at no very distant period.

“Were you to go thither, even next year,” Theodore observed, while speaking on the subject with Flavia alone, “Ammian would be some protection to you all; for I remark that his bold spirit and his mountain sports are every day

giving greater and greater vigour to his limbs, and his frame is towering up towards manhood. A year will do much in such pastimes as these, while the free and wild simplicity of the barbarian habits will secure him against the weak and effeminate manners of Rome; and, at the same time, it were but right and necessary that both he and Eudochia should receive that civilised education which can be obtained no where but in the empire."

"Alas! my son," replied Flavia, "I fear that it will be long ere Ammian can give us that protection which thou mightest do; for though courageous to a fault, and resolute, yet there is a wild and heedless spirit in his breast, which often prevents his nobler qualities from acting as they might. His heart is kind and generous, his mind upright and noble; but in the exuberance of his youthful daring, and the wanderings of a wild imagination, he forgets too often, Theodore, that there is such a thing as danger to himself or others. He wants prudence, he wants consideration, he wants that calm presence of mind which sees under all cir-

cumstances that which is best to do, and is ever ready to do it.”

“But, my mother, he is yet but a boy,” replied Theodore: “time will give prudence, experience will give judgment, and age will tame quickly the wildest and most’ wandering fancy. At all events, I only desire that you should have a refuge prepared. Doubtless — both because this mighty barbarian does really, I believe, regard me with affection, and because he has been taught to imagine that there is some mysterious connection between his fate and mine: — doubtless, I say, he will allow me from time to time to renew the visit he has now permitted: at all events, I will find means to send, both to give you my tidings and to gain news from you. If there be danger, I will let you know, and be ready ever, upon but a short warning, to fly to the court of Valentinian. As I go hence, I shall visit the capital of the Alani by the banks of the Inn; for the kindred that I have amongst them might think it strange and wrong, were I to pass through the land without seeing them; and when there, of course I will

do all I can to insure that the refuge which you have here received shall be as safe, as peaceful, and as happy, as it can be made. There is much in the ties of blood, even between a Roman and barbarian, and I think that my requests will find favour amongst the Alani."

Theodore would fain have lingered and protracted the hours; for although he knew that he soon must go, and the thought of parting sadly embittered even the present, yet around Ildica there was to him an atmosphere of light and happiness, which banished all that was dark and gloomy from his heart. But he had made a promise to Attila, and with Theodore a promise was inviolable. Ildica, too, would fain have detained him, would have fain drunk slowly out the last sweet drops of the cup of happiness which had been offered to her lip: they were but the dregs, it is true, and bitter was mixed with them, but yet the taste of joy remained; and if she could not have it pure and unalloyed, she yet lingered over the last portion, however sadly mingled. But Theodore had given

a promise ; and Theodore's unstained integrity, and unvarying truth, were as dear to Ildica as to himself — were dearer, far dearer, than any personal enjoyment. She would not have him forfeit his word to Attila, in order to remain with her for all that the world could give ; and she herself bade him go, whenever she learned that he had barely time to accomplish his journey by the path that it was necessary for him to follow. They parted — not now, however, as when last they parted ; for then before them had stretched out nothing but one vague and indefinite expanse — the grey cloud of the future ! on which even the eye of fancy could scarcely trace one likely form, through which the star of hope itself shone faint and powerless. Now, after all those fearful scenes, and that dreadful separation — scenes and circumstances, which had benumbed their feelings, and, like some crashing wound, which by its very severity deprives the sufferer of his sense of pain, had left them bewildered and almost unconscious, till time had shown them the deprivation they had undergone. — Now they had

met again ; hopes that they had scarcely dared to entertain, had been realised ere the heart grew weary with delay. They had known a longer and more tranquil period of happiness than they had ever tasted since first the mutual love of their young hearts had been spoken to each other ; and hope, the sweet sophist, skilful in turning to her purpose all things that befall, drew arguments from past joy in order to prove her promises for the future true.

They parted then : Ildica declared that she wished him to go, and Theodore strengthened himself in the remembrance of his promise. Yet, nevertheless, let no one think that their parting was not bitter : Theodore struggled even against a sigh ; and over the cheeks of Ildica rolled no tear, though on the dark long lashes that fringed her eyelids would sparkle like a crushed diamond the irrepressible dew of grief. Yet, nevertheless, let no one think the parting is ever less than bitter, when, even in the brightest day of youth, two hearts united by the great master bond which God assigned to man to bind him in the grievous pilgrimage

of life to one chosen from all his kind, are separated from one another for long indefinite hours, with loneliness of feeling and the dim uncertainty of human fate hanging over them like a dark cloud. Who shall say, when thus they part, that they shall ever meet again? Who shall say with what dark barrier the mighty hand of destiny may not close the way? whether death or misfortune, or interminable difficulty, may not cut short hope, or weary out the spirit in the bondage of circumstance, till expectation is vain of re-union on this side the tomb?

They parted firmly: but such partings are ever bitter; and when Theodore was gone, Ildica wept for long hours in silence; while he, as he rode on, beheld nothing of all that surrounded him; for the soul was then in the secret chamber of the heart communing sternly with her own grief.

CHAP. VIII.

THE RETRIBUTION.

SHIFT we the scene, and return to the kingdom of Attila ! It was the fourth day after Theodore had left the country of the Huns for that sweet distant land where happiness, as we have seen, awaited him, and a bright gleam of sunshine was destined to chequer his dark fate, when at a short distance from the bank of the Tibiscus, two barbarians, who had left their horses with their followers by the stream, walked slowly on amongst the trees, wading through the long grass and tangled bushes. At length, suddenly from a spot before them, came the flapping of heavy wings, and a hoarse arid scream from many a fowl beak, while five or six large vultures rose up crashing through the branches above, and leaving open to the sight all that remained

of the unfortunate Arab, Cremera. From some cause, a nail which had fixed one of the hands had fallen out, and the skeleton, for to such a thing was the corpse now nearly reduced, hung by the other palm; but two arrows were still seen hanging amidst the fleshless ribs, and telling the manner of the freedman's death.

“Lo!” said the shorter of the two strangers — “Lo! I have now seen it with mine own eyes! — And this man's crime was but that he had obeyed my commands, and saved the life of the man that I loved! Shall this be suffered, Arderic? Shall it last another hour to ring in the ears of my people, to sound into their inmost hearts, that Attila avenges not his own, that Attila cannot protect those who perform his bidding? Think you it was really Bleda's doing?”

“Doubt it not, oh King!” answered Arderic. “Was not the Roman carried to his village? Would not death have been the stranger's portion, too, had he not escaped? Some one bore thy brother the tidings of the youth's journey,

and they waylaid him, to cut the thread of life, on which they fancied thine depended.”

“Ay! It is even so! answered Attila. “Therein is it, that the Roman sinned in their eyes. But they shall find that I can rid me of mine enemies, and avenge my friends! To horse, Arderic! we will to our horses quick. The cup of vengeance is full and flowing over. He whom no warning could deter shall drink it to the dregs. The leaders we ordered must by this time have crossed the mountains.”

“They must have done so, oh Attila!” replied the king of the Gepidæ, “but what is thy will to do now? Thou wilt not surely ravage a part of thine own people’s lands; or by waging war against thy brother, give new hearts to the pale Romans?”

Attila stopped as he was advancing, and fixed his dark eyes full upon the countenance of Arderic. “Hast thou known me so long,” he said, “and canst not yet guess what Attila will do? Am I not king over this man also, to punish him for his evil deeds, when they are directed against myself. No, no! I will not

ravage mine own land, nor slay mine own people. But the son of Paulinus will I protect; and even yon freedman will I avenge; and I will crush the worm that raises its head against me, even though it call me brother. Arderic, dost thou not know what I will do? Bleda and I are no more for the same earth: I have borne with him long, but I bear with him no longer, and he dies! now thou understandest!" and with a quick firm pace, every footfall of which seemed to crush the earth it trod upon, he returned to the spot where the horses had been left.

About five hundred horsemen waited him there, and at their head, Attila took his way towards the east. After two hours' riding, some three thousand more joined him on the road; and at the end of two hours more he paused, and sent messengers in different directions to chieftains whom he named. Night fell, and with the first star of evening the monarch resumed his way.

The autumn moon rose large and full, pouring over the wide plain in which the dwelling of Bleda was placed, with a yellow tranquil

light: the voice of nature was all still; and not a sound was heard but the sighing of the wind through the branches, or the falling of a withered leaf amidst those that had gone down before it. A shooting star traversed the blue fields above, outshining, for the brief moment of its being, the moon herself, and then ending in emptiness. A heavy bird of night glanced across the moonlight, and with a faint scream disappeared.

It was about midnight, and then from the neighbouring wood came forth, in dead deep silence, troop after troop of shadowy forms; and leaving the village on one side, they drew a circle, fatal and sure as the unerring bowstring of a kindred race, around the dwelling of Bleda. They were all now on foot; and when they had reached the distance of about two hundred yards from the building, the circle was complete, and they paused.

“Now, Onegisus!” said Attila, “what hast thou to tell of the inquiries thou hast made. Speak, and if thou hast ought to say which should induce the King to spare his kindred lood, I will take thee to my heart and give

thee kingdoms! Speak!" and he clasped his hands together, and wrung the sinewy fingers hard, under emotions that even his iron soul could not restrain.

"Alas! oh King!" replied Onegisus, "I have nought to say, which may mitigate thy wrath. I had hoped that it would be otherwise; but I find—and I must speak truth unto the King—that even across the mountains the followers of thy brother pursued the Roman youth, and ravaged a village, killing several and driving away the herds of all, because they lent the son of Paulinus a horse to fly when he demanded it in thy name. Their dwellings are in the dust, and their blood stains the grass, and the widows and the children cry to Attila for vengeance."

"They shall have it!" replied Attila. "Let those appointed, follow me!" and he advanced to the portico of Bleda's house.

The chief door opened at once to the monarch's hand—"And can treason and treachery sleep so securely?" demanded Attila in a sad tone, as he turned through the first passage of

the noiseless dwelling to the large hall in which banquets were usually held. It still smelt strong of the feast; and the monarch paused in the midst, folding his arms upon his chest, and gazing bitterly upon the ground.

“Uldric,” he said at length, “Uldric, where art thou?”

A man of powerful frame, and countenance more than usually ferocious, advanced before the King, saying, “I am here, oh Attila, and ready.”

“Is thy sword sharp, and thy heart strong?” demanded Attila. The chief bent his head in token of assent, and the monarch went on: “Go, then,” he said, “and do the deed which none but a noble and brave hand should do! But slay him not in his sleep, for that would seem as if thou wert a murderer, and he a coward afraid to die. Wake him! Tell him his doom! Tell him the cause! Say he was warned, and would not hear; and that the cup has overflowed! Arderic, do thou see it done! Take warriors enough with thee that there be no resistance. Go! go!— Yet stay!” con-

tinued Attila: "Stay! Oh ye gods! why have ye put this upon me? Is there none here, who can speak a word in favour of my brother? none who can say aught to stay the anger of the King? All silent?—Go, then! go, Arderic! It is time that it were done."

Attila waved his hand, then bending down his eyes again, he remained motionless in the midst of those who stayed with him. But the only moment of indecision that he had ever shown throughout his life had passed away; and, as the moonlight streamed on his dark countenance, no trait of wavering doubt could there be seen. All was firm and calm, though stern and gloomy; and the knitted brow, the compressed lip, the clenched hand, told that there were pangs, but no hesitation within.

The last of those sent upon the mission of death quitted the hall, and with steps which were scarce heard even by waking ears, they went upon their errand. A minute elapsed, and then there came a murmur of voices, and then two or three loud shrieks from a woman's voice mingled with sobbing, prayers, and sad en-

treaties; — then a dead heavy fall — and then the tones of lamentation. Distant sounds succeeded, and the noise of steps in various parts of the building; cries of grief and terror followed, and some signs of contention were distinguished.

“ Bid them shed no more blood!” said Attila, turning to one who stood near: “ Cut off the head, but mangle not the body !”

Almost as he spoke, however, a slave rushed in with a lighted torch of pine in one hand, and a drawn sword in the other ; but when the light glared upon Attila, he stood suddenly motionless before the King, as if petrified with fear and astonishment. “ Oh King, they have slain thy brother !” he cried at length,

“ It is well !” answered Attila : “ get thee on one side, so shall no harm befall thee.” The next instant there came the sound of footsteps running quickly ; and Neva, with her hair dishevelled, and her feet uncovered, ran into the hall, and cast herself at the feet of Attila.

“ Oh, spare him ! spare him !” she cried ; “ spare him, for the memory of thy father !

Spare him for the remembered days of infancy ! Spare him, because of his weakness, and thy strength ! Pour not out thy kindred blood upon the dust ! Remember that thou wert a brother ere thou wert a king ! Spare him ; forgive him if he have offended thee !—But it cannot be ! They have lied unto me ; thou canst not seek thy brother's life ! Thou wouldst never slay him who has slept in the same cradle, eaten the same food, and stood by thy side in battle !—Yet what dost thou here ? Oh, spare him ! spare him !” and she clasped the knees of the dark monarch in the agony of apprehension.

Others had followed her, women and children and slaves ; and at nearly the same time, the chieftain called Uldric stood in the doorway, and held up before the eyes of Attila a naked sword, along the blade of which a drop or two of a dark red hue was seen to trickle in the torch-light.

“ Maiden !” said Attila, laying his hand on Neva's head, “ cease thine entreaties ; they are now vain. Yet have not I done this thing. His own hand it was that pulled the ruin on

his head. He it was that cast himself upon my sword, knowing that it was drawn, and that the hand was firm that held it. Weep, if thou wilt! Go to thy chamber and weep! it is the right and the weakness of woman. Go! but entreat no longer; thou hast none now to save!”

She heard not, or heeded not his words, but still clasped his knees, and with wild looks and streaming eyes, she poured forth her supplications. They were interrupted, however, by her mother's voice, who passed through the crowd like a spectre, and with spots of blood upon her garments stood before the King. “Ask him not to spare, my child,” she said in a voice as calm as death; “ask him not to spare! He knows no mercy! Ask him rather to give us our own doom quickly. Thy father is dead already; why should we be left alive? Or is it thy will, oh King, that we be sold as slaves? We are ready; but we would rather die, if the choice were left to such as us. We are but thy brother Bleda's widow and children, and therefore have no claim upon the conqueror of the

world; no, not even to choose between death and bondage. He that spared not his own brother will not spare the women and the babes."

"Woman, I did spare him!" answered Attila, solemnly: "three times did I spare, when any other man on earth, had he been monarch or slave, had died for so offending Attila. Woman, I spared him so long as his deeds affected but myself; but when he forgot all law and justice to my people, when he made ready the spear and sword to raise up contention in the land, when he slew the innocent and the noble, Attila forgot he had a brother. Neither bondage nor death await thee and thy children; thy husband's crimes have not affected thee; honour, and wealth, and peaceful possession of all that he possessed shall be thine; thy children shall be as my children, and I will defend them against their enemies. Attila sought not his brother's wealth; he sought but to do justice, and justice has been done. Take them hence, Arderic! take them hence! she is privileged to reproach and murmur; but Attila

would not that his ear should have any words that might offend him. Take them hence !”

They were removed without resistance ; and after pausing for a moment in thought, Attila demanded of some of those who had been present at his brother’s death, “ What men have ye found in the house ? ”

“ But few,” was the reply ; “ and they were slaves.”

“ Was the deformed negro, Zercon, amongst them ? ” asked the monarch again.

“ No,” replied the Hun to whom he spoke ; “ we found him not.”

“ Let him be sought,” said Attila, sternly. “ He it was, he it must have been, who betrayed to Bleda the young Roman’s journey. Accursed be all they who supply to kings the means of gratifying bad desires ! Let him be sought, and when found, scourge him from hence to Margus, and give him up to the chief, whom they call Bishop of that town. I promised him to love, defend, avenge his nephew ; and I would that he should know how I keep my word. Onegisus, thou shalt remain here. Keep the land

in peace; assuage the grief that thou findest; and see that no evil spirit rise amongst the tribes, to call for the hand of Attila, and divide the power of the Huns. Arderic," he continued, turning to the king of the Gepidæ, "I could wish, too, that messengers were sent to meet the son of Paulinus, as he returns from the banks of the Juvavus: let them be despatched, and tell him to return by Margus. That good priest of the new God of the Christians will see him joyfully, as this matter may have reached his ears, and he may be fearful for his nephew's safety. I would," he added, laying his hand upon the sleeve of Arderic's tunic, "I would that friends and enemies should see and know, that the word of Attila, be it for good, or be it for evil, is never broken; and that any one who finds a promise of the King unfulfilled, should boldly say, Attila is dead."

Thus speaking, he turned, and quitting the hall, issued out into the portico before the house of Bleda, over which the same calm moon was still shining; while round about, in awful silence, stood the dark circle of the Hunnish troops,

waiting the conclusion of the fatal deeds, enacting within that low and quiet-looking abode. Attila paused for a moment, and raised his hand to his eyes, as if the moonlight offended his sight. Then, striding forth into the open space, he turned and gazed for a few moments on the dwelling of Bleda. That contemplation was probably bitter, for as it ended, he exclaimed, "Alas, my brother!" And that was the only regret to which, throughout his life, the lips of Attila gave voice.

There were old men who had known him as a boy, and who lived to see his death, but they declared, that within that one night was comprised the whole that Attila had ever felt, either of indecision or regret.

CHAP. IX.

THE NEGRO.

THE wind blew keen over the plains through which the Danube wanders, ere, in approaching Orsova, it rushes between the giant mountains, through which it seems to have rent its onward course. Barbed with sleet, that cold wind dashed in the faces of the young Roman and his followers, as he led them onward towards the city of Margus, according to the directions which he had received from Attila by the way. He passed by Singidunum, and he rode through Tricornium. When last he had seen them, they were full of busy life, garrisoned with numerous troops, splendid with all the profuse luxury of old and corrupted civilisation. There was now a broken wall, a pile of ashes, solitude, silence, and the whispering grass — already, like the

world's forgetfulness, grown up upon the grave of things once bright. From the gate of Singidunum started away a wolf, as the young Roman passed; but under the wall of Tricornium, a solitary hovel, raised from the massy ruins of a gate, and thatched with the branches and the leaves of trees, showed, that either accident, or old attachment, had brought back some human being to dwell in that place of desolation. Theodore approached, but he found it was no other than an old half-crazy woman, who, when she saw him, shrieked forth, "The Huns! the Huns!" and fled, stumbling and tottering amidst the piles of ruins.

What a strange contrast was it, when, the next day, he approached the gates of Margus! Gradually the desolation ceased; the country resumed its appearance of fertility: cultivated fields and rich gardens appeared; the villa, the palace, and the church crowned the summits of the gentle hills; and every thing betokened uninterrupted peace, and a place of splendour, luxury, and repose. As he entered the gates, were seen the Roman soldiers, fully armed and

equipped; but his Hunnish garb, and the barbarian features of those who accompanied him, seemed rather passports to secure his entrance, than impediments in his way. No opposition was offered, and the soldiers gazed upon him with a smile.

In the market-place, which was crowded with people, as gay, as lively, as splendid as any city of the empire could display, a number of Huns were loitering about amongst the rest; and a Greek flower girl, mistaking him for one of the barbarians, ran up, and while she fixed a garland of myrtle, mingled with some of the latest flowers of autumn, to his saddle-bow, addressed him in a few broken mis-pronounced sentences in the Hunnish dialect, desiring him to buy her flowers with some of the spoils of the enemy he had slain in battle.

Theodore could have wept; but he answered the girl in Greek, telling her to place her wreaths on the tombs of those who had died in defence of their country; and he was riding on, when suddenly his eye was caught by a train crossing the market-place, and his ear almost

deafened by the acclamations of the people. While slaves and attendants, in extraordinary numbers, both followed and succeeded, in the midst of the group which attracted so much attention, was seen a chariot of ivory and gold, drawn by four white horses; and in it sat, bowing his head to the people, and scattering benedictions as he passed with his hands extended wide in graceful dignity, Eugenius, Bishop of Margus.

Loud and repeated were the vivats of the multitude; and Theodore heard nothing on every side but warm and joyful praises of his kinsman. "Our good bishop," cried one. — "Bless him for ever," exclaimed another. — "He alone saved us in peace and prosperity, when all was death and desolation round," said a third. — "Ay," rejoined his neighbour, "and Theodosius himself, who would have given him up to death, is now thankful enough to him for having saved the town of Margus." — "And well he may be," said a fifth, who overheard what was proceeding; "well he may be thankful to him, for saving the finest, if not

the largest, city of his empire." — "I have heard," said another, "that Theodosius has vowed to put him to death, but that he is forced to dissemble for fear of Attila." — "He had better dissemble," answered one of those who had spoken before; "put to death! we would sooner give ourselves altogether up to the Huns." — "The Huns are very good people," continued another, seeing Theodore and his followers endeavouring to make their way past them. "I love the Huns; they are honest, and keep their word, and are only terrible to their enemies."

Theodore could not but smile, although his heart was full of bitterness; but he thought, at the same time, "If all these people judge thus of the bishop's conduct, how many arguments may he not find in his own bosom to justify the acts he has committed."

Thus thinking, he pushed on his horse, and made his way through the crowd towards the dwelling of the bishop, whither the chariot of the prelate seemed to have proceeded before him; for a crowd of men and boys, who had ac-

accompanied it with loud acclamations, were now gathered together round the gates, the janitor of which had much ado to keep them from pushing their way into the building. Theodore demanded to see his uncle, and told his name, on which he and all his followers were instantly admitted.

He found the bishop seated near the centre of the hall, with a crowd of attendants near him, while before him stood several Huns in their barbarian garb, one of whom had his hand upon a chain, which was attached to the neck and hands of the miserable, deformed, and mutilated negro, Zercon. He was nearly stripped of his fantastic clothing, and with bare feet, bloody with long journeying, he stood with a haggard but a tearless eye, venting, even at that hour of misery, one of those wild jests which had procured him favour with his former lord.

“Faith, sir,” he said, speaking apparently to the bishop, “you had better order me death, if you intend to punish me properly; I have tried all other punishments but that, and

therefore you have no choice left; as for the horrid prison that you talk of, I once inhabited for fifty years a prison more horrible than any you can devise."

"For fifty years!" exclaimed the bishop, "for fifty years! Say, where was that?"

"Here!" said the negro, striking his hand upon his breast; "here! Match me that, if you can. Let the greatest tyrant that ever cumbered earth show me a prison that will equal this; and herein has dwelt, for fifty years, a being not less sensible of pain, not less alive to kindness, not less capable of gratitude than any; but more patient, more enduring, more courageous than you all. Here, in this loathsome and abhorred prison, has he dwelt, scorned, buffeted, contemned, accused, condemned and punished without guilt, the sport of fools, and scape-goat of the bad. Every thing has been tried upon me that human wickedness could frame, or man's endurance bear. Try death, at last! I cannot lose by the exchange."

The eye of the bishop had remained fixed

upon the deformed negro, while he poured forth, in an eloquent tone, the words that we have repeated, and only wandered for a moment to the group of strangers who entered the atrium, observing nothing more than that they wore the common garb of the Huns. He was evidently moved by the man's speech, and was about to reply, when Theodore advanced, addressing him by his name. The bishop started up, and after gazing at him for a moment, folded him in his arms.

“Theodore!” he exclaimed, “now can I welcome you indeed to Margus; — a Tadmor in the wilderness; a prosperous city in a land of desolation — But how came you hither?”

“I will tell you shortly, sir,” replied Theodore; “but, in the first place, let me ask you, why stands this poor man before you thus?”

“He was sent hither,” replied the bishop, “by Attila, that great and mighty king, whose words are as true as his arm is powerful. He promised me, long ago, to protect and defend you; and this slave, it seems, betrayed your purposed journey into the mountains to the ear of

Bleda, your enemy. Therefore is it that Attila sends him hither, to receive what punishment I will. I doom no man to death; but I was about to sentence him to solitude and chains, in the tower, by the water side."

"God has spared you a great crime," replied Theodore. "This man betrayed me not. Far from it. He aided to save my life, when, ere another evening sun had set, my fate would have been sealed. Twice has he contributed to deliver me from danger. Oh! set him free, my uncle. Take off that chain! it is not fitting for him. His mind is noble and generous, though his body is as thou seest. But what have we to do with that? God, wise and mysterious, has made him as he is; let us not trample on God's handiwork."

The negro sprang forward, dragging his chain after him; and casting himself at the feet of the young Roman, he dewed his hand with tears. "It is not," he cried, "it is not that you come to save me, but it is that you speak as if I were your fellow-man."

"Far be it from me, my son," said the bishop,

“to treat any one possessed of our common nature otherwise than as a Christian should do. We are all worms in the eyes of God, the greatest, the proudest, the most beautiful, as well as the lowly, and the distorted. Take the chain from him, and let him go free. Now, tell me truly, man, I adjure thee by whatever thou holdest sacred, tell me, was it thou who bore to Bleda the tidings of this youth’s journey, and if so ——”

“There is no if!” interrupted the negro, with solemn vehemence: “I opened not my lips. Was I not the first to warn him, that Bleda hated him? Did I not convey to the ears of Attila himself timely notice of his brother’s purpose, when Bleda whetted the sword against him between Viminacium and Cuppæ? Did I not hear Bleda vow, that till age palsied his arm, or death closed his eyes, he would pursue that youth with vengeance, and seek the destruction of that bold Arab, who dared to struggle with and overthrow him? Did I know all this, and do all this, and yet betray to the tiger thirsting for blood the track of the deer that he sought

to overtake? Did I know all this, and do all this, and yet tell to Bleda, that he, who had shown me pity and sympathy, came as it were to offer his throat to the knife within eight hours of that fierce man's dwelling-place? Oh no! I opened not my lips. There were whole tribes of Bleda's people round, when the boy Ernac told me that the Roman was about to depart from the land. They bore the tidings to the King; and he gained from Ellac, the eldest son, the course of his whole journey, and the number of people whom they supposed would follow him. The number proved ten times more than they expected, and Bleda had too few with him to attack them all. He took vengeance on the Arab, however; and the Roman youth, after Bleda's departure, fell into a trap baited with his freedman's blood. I betrayed him not, but I aided to save him, and he knows it."

"I do," answered Theodore: "had it not been for thee, and for one whom I will not name, I had ended my life long ere now. But say, how am I to return to the dwelling of Attila when the tribes of Bleda lie across my way?"

“Did not those who told thee to come hither tell thee more?” demanded the negro.

“They told me nothing,” answered Theodore, “but that it was the will of Attila I should pass by Margus as I returned. Of Bleda, they said nothing.”

“Bleda, oh Roman,” replied the negro, “the powerful, the revengeful, the unforgiving, is like a dry stramonium bush in the desert, whose bitterness is parched up and gone, whose very thorns are withered and powerless. His name, his mighty name, is like the whisper of the wind among the rocks, speaking of tempests that we feel no more, of blasts from which we are sheltered!—Bleda is dead, oh, Roman; his arm is in the dust.”

“Dead!” said Theodore, a presentiment of the dark truth coming over him, even before it was spoken; “dead! How did he die?”

“Those who told thee to come hither,” said the negro, “were right to tell thee no more. Over the name of Bleda, and over his fate, there hangs a cloud: the Huns speak of it not, and are wisely silent; but of this I am sure, that

there are not twenty men throughout all the land who do not feel that they are more at ease since there has been one great and unquiet spirit less in the world."

"But his children!" exclaimed Theodore, now fully convinced by the dark hints of the negro, that the death of Bleda had been of an unusual and a bloody kind. "His family? his children? what has become of them?"

"They are safe," replied the negro, "they are safe and well; and one fair maiden, good, and gentle, and kindly as thou art, would fain have saved even me, lowly as I am, from a fate that she knew I deserved not. But her intercession was of no avail; and to say the truth, for I am well nigh wearied out with this sad life, I grieved more that she should plead in vain than that I should be the object for which she vainly pleaded."

"My nephew shall try to make life more supportable to thee," replied the bishop. "Thou shalt go back with him, and he shall clear thee before the King. For well thou knowest, that when Attila has resolved the destruction of any

one, no land can prove a shelter, no distance a barrier, no time an impediment, till he be avenged or appeased."

"I know it well," replied the negro; "and I know also, and willingly will say it, that fierce and stern as that great king is sometimes called, no one is more easily appeased for personal offences, no one more attentive to justice where truth can be made plain. Even with his brother Bleda did he not forbear to the very last, though he well knew that his designs were pointed against Attila, not against the son of Paulinus?"

"How so?" demanded the bishop: "thy words are dark, my brother; I know not and cannot even divine the cause of Bleda's hatred to my nephew. He injured him not."

"I could make my dark words clear," answered the negro in Greek. "But I love not to talk of things that do not concern me, when there are many ears around."

The bishop paused for a moment, and giving the attendants of Theodore and the Huns who had brought the negro thither into the hands of one of his own officers, he bade

him entertain them well, and return to conduct the unhappy Zercon thence in a few minutes. The attendants of the bishop easily divined his wishes, and the hall being instantly cleared, the negro was left alone with Eugenius and Theodore.

“Now,” said the bishop, “now explain this mystery, why a man in command of reason should hate and seek the death of another who had never injured or offended him, and that, too, at first sight.”

“Speak, Zercon,” added Theodore, “and let us know the whole, for I have heard from Arderic and others, a part of the story, yet much remains unexplained. Was it not some prophecy that ——”

“Listen, and you shall hear,” said Zercon. “When Attila first heard that this noble bishop had carried off some treasures ——”

“I carried off no treasures !” exclaimed the prelate, “and so I proved unto the King.”

“But he heard that you had,” answered the negro, “and that cause—with many another offence committed by the Romans, together with

some idle time on his part, and no other object of conquest before his eyes—made him resolve to pour the tide of war upon the eastern empire. When Attila then first determined upon war, he gathered his myriads together on the first plain beyond the mountains; and while messengers came to and fro, in order to avert hostilities which were already resolved, the King went up to the mountains to ask a holy man, who dwells there, the issue of his enterprise. So has he done in all the wars of the last five years, and the words of the hermit have ever proved true; for he promised Attila victory, and to those who know him it needs not be a prophet to foresee that. Now, also, he assured him of success, but upon one condition. He told him that if he would ride down towards the Danube with but few followers, he would meet a Roman on the Hunnish bank of the river, whom he should spare, and protect, and love. If wrong befell that Roman, or any of his family, the old man told him, either from the hand of Attila himself, or any of his people,

and if, for seven years, he, Attila, did not secure and protect him against all his enemies, not only his course of victory would cease, but death itself would cut him off in his return to his own hearth. ‘His fate,’ said the hermit to the King when he told this tale, ‘his fate is bound up with yours! See that no evil happen to him, for worse will instantly fall upon yourself. You shall do him no wrong — you shall show him all favour. Go now and seek him!’ Such were the old man’s words.”

The Bishop of Margus smiled, as the negro proceeded, but Zercon went on with his tale: “Attila rode on from that spot; but ere he had reached the banks of the great river he was met by some people posting inland to say, that a Roman had ventured across the stream but slenderly attended, notwithstanding the daily feuds that already gave notice of the coming war, and to ask what they should do with him. At those tidings, Attila and Bleda both saw the first part of the old man’s prophecy fulfilled, and from that moment they doubted not one word of the rest. Attila went on without his

brother, and found this youth — Ye yourselves know all the rest.”

“ Still we see not why Bleda should seek his life,” replied the bishop, “ unless, indeed, he sought to take his brother’s also; and then he might have taken it at once.”

“ He sought not to take his brother’s life,” replied Zercon: “ he dared not, or he would; but he believed the prophecy, and thought that if this young Roman, on whom his brother’s life and fortunes depended, were away, a hundred accidents in the course of war might lay the head of Attila in the dust. Ever through life did he covet whatever Attila possessed, and therefore was it that he sought at first to take a life on which that of his brother depended. Afterwards revenge was added to the same ambition; but his plans had gone still farther. His daring had increased with impunity; and day by day he was nerving his heart to contend with Attila himself, vainly hoping that many of the Great King’s chiefs — perhaps even some of the monarch’s children — would

join him. But his life and his plots ended together."

"Wert thou with Bleda?" demanded Theodore, to whose ear the prophecy of the old man, and its partial accomplishment, appeared strange and interesting: "wert thou with Bleda and Attila when the hermit told him to go down to meet me?"

"I was!" replied Zercon, showing his white teeth with a wild laugh—"I was! Attila, when he set out, chose Arderic and Onegisus to go with him; and Bleda asked the king of the Gepidæ whom he had better choose, for they made a solemn ceremony of it. Arderic, who believes in no such things, replied, 'Why, take your black jester!' and whether Bleda thought that too a prophecy, or not, I cannot tell, but certainly he took me, and I stood in the mouth of the cave while they conversed within."

He was interrupted by a woman entering to draw water from the tank, in the midst of the hall; and ere she was gone, the bishop's officer returned to conduct Zercon from his presence.

"Use him well," said the bishop, "and

kindly. Put him among the most favoured slaves; give him water to wash his feet, and food and wine. Nor must any one make a jest of him. It is forbidden in my dwelling to mock any of God's works."

The slave and the negro retired, and Theodore was left alone with his uncle, round whose lip, a somewhat doubtful smile had hung, during the whole of Zercon's account of that prediction which had obtained for his nephew security in some respects, and brought him into danger in others.

"The words of the good hermit, I rather think," he said, as soon as the negro departed, "have led even the mighty and clear-sighted Attila into error."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Theodore, in some surprise; "then you do not credit his pretensions to be a prophet?"

"He is better than a prophet, my son, he is a wise man," replied the somewhat worldly prelate; but instantly seeing, by the mounting colour in his nephew's cheek, that his profane words had shocked the sensitive mind of youth,

he added, “ Far be it from me to say that the gift of prophecy is not excellent ; but it is better to be a good man, and wise unto God, than to be a prophet, and offend. This hermit is a man of all great qualities and Christian virtues ; austere unto himself, charitable towards others ; holy in life, spending his years in meditation and constant prayer ! There is much reason to believe that to such a one the gift of prophecy might be extended. So much did I think of his wisdom, and so far did I trust in his advice being holy and good, that, ere the Huns poured down upon the Roman empire, I sent messengers to ask his counsel as to mine own conduct in such a moment of trial. He loves me well ; and for many years I have profited by his wisdom and experience, till I am what I am. To show him and all men that personal fear was unknown to the bosom of Eugenius, I told him that on a certain day I would cross the Danube myself and advance towards the mountains, if he would come down to meet me ; and I doubt not that his prophecy referred to me and not to thee. Attila came down sooner

than was expected, and encountered thee on the way : thy sudden coming delayed me for a day ; and ere I crossed the river, the myriads of the Huns were pouring down from the mountains. I obtained a promise of security, however, from Attila himself ; saw him, found him mild to treat with, and easily appeased. The wiles of the Byzantine court he abhorred ; but I told him truth. I offered to show him mine own treasury and the treasury of the city, and that we should purge ourselves, by the most solemn oath, of all share in taking that treasure, which his people declared they had lost ; but at the same time I proposed to repay it with fourfold its value as amends. He received the proposal well ; swore to me solemnly that he would protect thee and Flavia, and all her household ; and, upon some other conditions which he made, he promised to give the citizens of Margus peace. Thou seest how he has fulfilled his word.”

“ I see it, indeed, my uncle,” answered Theodore ; “ I see that Margus, like an oasis in the Libyan sands, is fresh, and bright, and luxu-

riant, in the midst of ruin and desolation. But, alas ! alas ! would it have been so, if Margus had not opened her gates to the invader ? if the first city of the Roman empire had made a stand against the barbarians as they poured upon the frontier ? ”

“ The only difference would have been,” replied the bishop, his brow growing dark, “ that Margus would now have been in the same situation as the rest. What troops had we to resist ? What means of defence had Theodosius given us ? None ! He thought but to appease the evil spirit of the war by drawing a line in my blood between himself and the wrath of Attila ; and he took no measure to defend his territories, made no effort to protect his people. How did Viminacium stand, which had ten centuries within its walls ? how did Tricornium resist ? how Singidunum, how Naissus, Sardica, Ratiaria, and all the cities of the Illyrian border ? Singidunum resisted for a day ; Viminacium saw the Hunnish myriads with the dawning light, and was a heap of ashes ere nightfall. So was it with all the rest ! —

Theodore, I am satisfied. In the midst of the desolation of the land, where many hundreds of thousands have fallen, where every trace of cultivation, and of sweet domestic peace, has been swept away, I have saved a Christian people in peace and prosperity, without one drop of blood shed, either of our own or others."

Theodore thought that this was one of those few accidental cases where good had sprung from evil; but his heart, as a Roman and a man, told him that his uncle's reasoning was false. He replied not, however, and the prelate went on. "I have done all this, Theodore, and I am satisfied. Is it not enough for the shepherd to save his sheep from the wolf, though the monster be obliged to seek his prey in some other flock? Would it not be enough for me to have delivered from peril and death those whom God has given to me, without any consideration of others? But when I know, and did know, that nothing I could have done would have saved myself or benefited them who have since fallen, ought I not to be satisfied? Whenever in my own heart a weak doubt arises,

one shout of the glad multitude, who owe their lives to me, is sufficient to put all at peace within my breast. Yes, I can look back to every circumstance, and say, This have I done, and I am satisfied! But I have done more, oh Theodore!" he added, his mind seeming suddenly to turn into another path, and a different expression coming over his countenance — "I have done more! The weak, pale, cowardly Theodosius, who, trembling on his throne, would have spilt my blood, out of the true tyrant's vice of terror — the heretical wretch, led by the subtle Eutyches to persecute all those who hold the pure and orthodox faith — dare no longer wag a finger at Eugenius, or talk of punishing the citizens of Margus for submitting to an enemy they could not resist, and from whom he refused to defend them. He dare not dream of striking a hair from the head of one of the citizens of Margus! Nor, since Attila is thy protector, would he dare to lay hands upon thee, even if thou wert to cross the courts of his palace to-morrow — No, not for his very throne!"

Theodore was unconvinced ; but he refrained from reply, and turned the conversation to another part of the same subject, by relating to the bishop the kindly offers of protection which Flavia had received from Valentinian.

“ He has kept his word,” replied the bishop, “ for such was the tenor of a promise that he made to me. Think not that I went rashly and hastily into even that act, which I knew would save Margus. To Theodosius I had applied for aid in vain, and I then applied to Valentinian. He could not aid me, but he justified my conduct, and promised me personal protection in case of need. I sent him messengers, when all was secure, and he engaged to give both to Flavia and yourself justice, protection, and support, in the empire of the West.”

Theodore felt that his uncle was kind, far more kind than he could have expected or hoped ; he felt, too, that his mind was powerful, and his heart not without high and noble feelings ; but, alas ! the threads of cunning selfishness ran hither and thither through the whole, and, like the veins of some inferior substance

in a precious stone, rendered nearly valueless the better part. Theodore felt that he could love Eugenius; but he would not have been Eugenius for the world.

Thus passed the day; but the next morning, as Theodore sat at meat with his uncle, it was announced that Edicon, one of the favourite officers of Attila, together with Maximin, ambassador from Theodosius, approached the city of Margus in their way, from Constantinople to the country of the Huns; and when Theodore beheld the reverence and respect which the ambassador himself, and those who accompanied him, evinced towards the prelate who had first received the barbarians into the empire, he could not help feeling how brilliant a thing in the eyes of man is successful evil. During a whole day the ambassador and his train sought repose in Margus — and Theodore determined to accompany him on his onward journey. His uncle forced upon him a casket of gold, ere he departed, conquering his aversion to receive it by declaring that it was a debt he had owed Paulinus; and Theodore, feeling that it might be needful, made no farther resistance.

CHAP. X.

THE WIDOW'S DWELLING.

NEAR a bend of the Tibiscus, on a meadow that might have refreshed the weary eye in summer by its beautiful verdure, the Romans pitched their tents at the close of their first day's journey in the land of the Huns. The night was dark and gloomy ; no golden sunset had cheered the world on the departure of the light ; and covering all the heavens, in long wavy lines from the horizon to the zenith, stretched out a canopy of heavy clouds, like waves of molten lead rolled over the sky. Maximin, struck and pleased with Theodore, had invited him to his tent ; and there, by skilful and kindly inquiries, he won from the son of Paulinus a sketch of all the events which had affected him personally since the death of his father. There was much that Theodore omitted, because he trifled not

with the confidence of others; but Maximin learned enough to show him that the youth was held by Attila in a state of honourable, but unwilling, captivity; and he resolved to use his best efforts to redeem him from such a situation.

While they thus conversed by the dull lamp-light, the pattering of some heavy drops of rain was heard upon the tent, and, mingled with the rushing murmur of the Tibiscus, came the low sobbing of the rising wind. Their conversation, however, was too interesting to allow them to give much attention to the storm without; for, besides the feelings of sympathy which Theodore had excited in the bosom of the noble Maximin, he had much information to communicate concerning the manners and habits of the Huns, and the character of Attila himself; all which the ambassador knew might prove most valuable to him at an after period.

The rain increased whilst they talked; the river roared and raged; the wind rose into fierce gusts, and the poles of the tent were seen to quiver under the violent blasts, while the trick-

ling drops began to welter through the tent, and threatened to extinguish the light. At length, after a long moaning sound, a fiercer gust than all the rest swept the sky; the tent-poles shook, bent, gave way, tearing up the earth into which they were driven; the cords and pegs, which stretched out the covering, were broken or loosened in a moment, and the tent, with all that it contained, was dashed with fury to the ground.

As soon as Maximin and Theodore could disentangle themselves from the fallen mass, they found that the whole of their little encampment had shared the same fate. All was confusion and disarray. Every light had been extinguished: the torches, drenched with the fallen deluge, could not be lighted. The night was as black as the jaws of Acheron; and all that could be distinguished was a glistening line of water, every moment approaching nearer, as the Tibiscus, filled by a thousand mountain-torrents, began to overflow the meadow in which the Roman tents had been pitched.

While engaged in removing, with difficulty

and haste, the horses and baggage to a more elevated situation, a number of lights were seen coming over the nearest hill; and in a few moments forty or fifty Huns, bearing torches of resinous pine, which neither the rain extinguished, nor the wind blew out, came down to render assistance to the party of whose encampment in the neighbourhood they had heard before the storm. While some remained to aid in saving the baggage from the encroaching Tibiscus, others led Maximin, Theodore, and their companions, towards the village, which they said was not far off; and as they went, Theodore saw several of the new comers sporting, as an old acquaintance, with the negro Zercon, who had returned with him.

Calling the unhappy jester to him, Theodore asked who were to be their entertainers; and a feeling of pain, as well as interest, passed through his bosom, when he heard that their steps were bent towards the dwelling of Bleda's widow.

“I knew not that the village was so near the river,” said Theodore, “and yet I know the country well.”

“She dwells not where she did dwell,” replied Zercon. “When gall is mingled with hydromel, we abhor the sweet drink that we used to love, and its very sweetness makes the bitter more nauseous. Scenes that we have loved, when associated with painful memories, like honey mixed with gall, are more repugnant to us from the remains of sweetness. She has never dwelt where she did dwell since her husband’s death. It was in visiting that spot, after having been hidden for many weeks, that I was found by the soldiers of Attila, and driven on foot to Margus.”

Theodore made no reply, but walked on thoughtfully, by the side of Maximin. In a few minutes they saw before them the village towards which their steps were bent, and the porch of the widow’s dwelling, from the windows of which streamed forth many a light to guide them on the way; and gladly the Romans approached the hospitable walls which promised them shelter from the inclemency of the weather.

As they entered the wooden portico, the

widow of Bleda, and a number of other women, came forth to meet them, but Neva was not amongst the rest. With a calm but somewhat sad demeanour the widow welcomed Maximin and his companion Priscus, and Edicon, who followed next. But when her eyes fell upon Theodore, she paused for a moment, and gazed on him with a dark and melancholy look. At length the tears burst forth in large drops from her eyes; and, casting her arms round the young Roman, whom in his illness she attended as her own child, she exclaimed, "It was not your fault, my son! it was not your fault! Be you welcome also!"

The table was already spread for a banquet in the great hall. Three blazing fires of odorous pine were lighted to dry the garments of the guests, and every thing bespoke rapid preparations made to exercise the kindest rites of hospitality. No sooner were their vestments dry, than large portions of venison, and various kinds of game from the neighbouring woods, were set before them; and while the widow stood by, to see that nothing was wanting to

their comfort, a fair train of girls, followed by several slaves, came in to hand the cups of rich and excellent wine, which flowed abundantly around. At their head appeared Neva, the daughter of the house. She was clad in deep grey cloth, with broad furs of sable bordering her robe. Her arms, up to the shoulders, were bare, and the snowy whiteness of her skin, beside those dark furs, looked like Indian ivory contrasted with ebony.

Theodore saw her enter with feelings of deep agitation, for he feared lest she should be pained and grieved by the sight of him for whom she had done and suffered so much. It would appear, however, that some one had prepared her for his presence, for she looked not upon him when first she entered, but went round with the rest, and only raised her eyes once to his countenance ere she approached him in turn. That one glance showed Theodore that she recognised him, but was nevertheless quite calm; and when she approached him, and took a cup of wine from one of the attendants to give it to him, she stood by his side, and, looking in his

face with a melancholy smile, she said aloud, "How art thou, my brother? Art thou well after thy long journey? And hast thou seen the friends thou lovest? And are they happy?"

Theodore could have wept; there was something so sad, and yet so resigned under her grief, in the tone of that fair young creature, who, if ever sorrow spared a human breast, should surely have been sheltered from the arrows of adversity. He strove against his feelings, however, and replied calmly, thanking her for all her kindness and all her generosity. Maximin gazed with some surprise to see the tender interest which the family of the dead king seemed to take in his countryman, but he made no remark aloud; and retiring soon from the banquet, the whole party of journeyers sought repose.

Weariness made most of them sleep long; but Theodore was awake and up by the dawning day. Sleep would not visit him in that dwelling; and with the first grey light of the morning he left the chamber which had been assigned him. He found Zercon, the jester,

stretched, sleeping, on a skin at his door; and the moment the passing of the young Roman woke him, he started up, and ran away through some of the passages of the house. Theodore went on into the porch and gazed out, and in a moment after Neva was by his side.

“I bade poor Zercon watch for you, Theodore,” she said, “because I wished to ask you, ere you went, to wander for an hour once more with Neva in the morning woods. Will you not, my brother? I have many a question to ask you, and I cannot ask them here, where every body may hear them, or interrupt them. Will you not come, my brother?”

“Willingly, sweet Neva,” replied Theodore, still holding the hand she had given him in his. “Let us go.” And they wandered forth together along a path which, winding in amongst the trees, turned at each step of the hill, showing the woody world below under some new aspect every moment. The wind had cleared the sky, and the day was fine; but Neva seemed more sad than on the night before. She said

but little for some way as they wandered on, but asked him questions about his journey, in a wild, rambling way. At length, however, with a forced smile, but a trembling tone, she said, "And of course you saw your promised bride?"

"I did," said Theodore, "and I told her that I twice owed my life to you, in sickness and in danger."

Neva, however, seemed to take but little notice of his reply. Continuing, apparently in the same train of thought in which she had begun, "And did you think her very beautiful?" she said — "as beautiful as ever?"

"More so," answered Theodore, "far more so."

Neva smiled. "May you be happy!" she said; "may you be happy! Doubtless the time since I saw you last has been a happy time to you and her, but it has been a terrible time to me and mine. You know that they came and slew my father, even on his couch of rest?" and she fixed her full bright eyes upon him with a look of painful earnestness.

Theodore saw that she waited his answer, and

replied, "I heard so, for the first time, three days ago, at Margus."

"Did you not know it before?" she cried eagerly. "Did no one tell it you? Did you not know that it would be so?"

"Never!" answered Theodore. "How could I guess that so fearful, so terrible a deed was so near its accomplishment?"

"Thank God for that!" she cried; "thank God for that! That is peace and balm indeed. But let us sit down here," she added, pausing at a rocky bank, where a break in the woods showed the country stretched beneath their feet, and the Tibiscus wandering in the distance — "let us sit down here, and talk over it all. Oh, Theodore! my heart has been sad since I saw you. They came and slew my father in the night, and I knelt at the feet of his terrible brother and begged for his life in vain; and afterwards they said that it was for what he had done against you that he was slain. I feared and fancied that you had stirred up Attila against him, and I remembered that I had set you free, and that I

— I might thus have had a share in my father's death."

She paused for a moment, terribly agitated; but ere Theodore could find words to comfort her, she went on rapidly: "But think not," she said, "think not, for one moment, that, even had it been so, I would have wished what I had done, undone. I saved the innocent from the cruel death they meditated against him. I saved the good and the innocent, and I had nought to do with the rest. Yet it was terrible, Theodore — oh, how terrible! — to think that I had aided to spill my father's blood, by saving him that I love;" and, leaning her head upon his shoulder, she wept long and bitterly.

"Weep not, Neva!" said Theodore, "weep not, my sister! You did but what was generous and noble, and that deed had no share in your father's death. All my own followers, but one or two, had escaped when I was taken, and they, not I, bore to the ears of the king the tidings of what had happened. I did nothing to provoke him against thy father; but had I been slain, the wrath of Attila would have been still greater.

Weep not, dear Neva !” he continued, as her tears, having once more burst forth, flowed on apace ; “ weep not !” And, holding her in his arms, he called up every argument to console her. He held her in his arms : he used many a tender and endearing epithet : he even pressed his lips upon her cheek ; and yet no feeling but one, pure, noble, and generous, was in his heart at that moment. There was a being that loved him with the most devoted affection which the human heart can feel, clinging to him in her deep distress, weeping on his bosom, pouring out her griefs and apprehensions to his ear ; and though he could not return her love, as love, yet his heart told him that he would be ungrateful if he felt towards her otherwise than as a brother. The kiss that he pressed upon her cheek was not cold, because it was kindly ; and the arms which encircled her held her tenderly because gratefully : but it was with the embrace of fraternal protection. Shame upon those who cannot comprehend such feelings ! That kiss and that embrace seemed but to say, “ Neva, you have lost your father, but you have yet one

in the world, who, if he cannot, if he ought not, to feel for you as you feel for him, will protect; will console, will sympathise with you — nay, will love you dearly, tenderly, though with but a brother's love."

Neva felt that it was so. She would have started from his arms with fear, had there been aught of passion in their touch; she would have fled from him for ever, had there been aught of fire on his lips: but it was all kindly tenderness, and she laid her head upon his shoulder to weep as she would have done upon a brother's.

After a while, her tears ceased, and she looked up. "You have taken the thorn from my heart, Theodore," she said; "I shall now sleep at nights. My fancy had conjured up many strange things; for though I knew you to be kind and generous, yet I knew you had been greatly wronged, and that the poor Arab, who had watched you with me through a long, sad sickness, had been slain by my father's commands; and I thought that, in your anger, you might have gone back to Attila and demanded blood for blood. Then I, by saving you, might

have slain my own father; and I was afraid to ask my own heart if I would not have done so, even if I had known how it was all to end. But you give me peace, by telling me that the end would have been the same, even had you been slain."

"The end might have been worse, my sister," replied Theodore, "for Attila's wrath might have known no bounds; and besides, his anger against your father was of no new date. I heard him warn him, months before, that the cup of his indignation was full, and that another drop would make it run over. That drop was certainly the death of the poor Arab, Cremera, but of that Attila was aware ere I reached his dwelling after my escape, and the vengeance he took was all unasked by me."

"Oh, thanks be to the gods!" replied Neva gladly, "for I have felt as if a rock had fallen upon my heart and crushed it, ever since that thought crossed my mind. But now, Theodore, now I am happy."

"And happy, entirely happy, should I too be, dear Neva," replied Theodore, "if I could

find any way of showing to you my deep gratitude and regard. Oh, Neva, that I could be a brother to you, and protect you against danger and sorrow, and wipe every tear away from your eyes !”

“ And so you shall,” she answered, with a smile which had still its share of sadness ; though as soon as the bitterness of her tears was over, she had withdrawn herself gently from the young Roman’s arms, and now sat apart. “ And so you shall. You shall wed your fair bride, and I will come and dwell near you, and see your happiness, and find pleasure in it too, Theodore, and never be envious : and you will be kind to me ; and she will too, I am sure, for your sake. All the time, too, that you dwell amongst the Huns, I will watch for moments to help and befriend you, so that I shall have a right to share in your regard, and in hers too ; and then, perhaps, the end of our days may glide by in peace. Oh, how gladly will I devote a whole life to guard and care for you ! Remember, too, your promise ! Send to Neva when you need aid or counsel. Aid, strong and

powerful, she can procure you even yet; counsel, if she cannot give it wisely, she can obtain from those who can. And now let us return, my brother. You will be glad to know that you have made poor Neva as happy as it is possible for her to be."

Thus saying, and with one of those blander and more beaming smiles which Theodore had often seen upon her face, ere yet a grief had shaded it, she turned and led the way down the hill. The world were now all abroad; but she took her way on through the midst by the young Roman's side, seemingly careless of all attempt to conceal an attachment for which she felt no shame.

CHAP. XI.

THE FEAST OF ATTLILA.

SPLENDOUR and feasting reigned in the halls of Attila. Round the immense hall of his cottage palace were spread tables on every side; and the wooden walls, quaintly carved and ornamented, were further decorated for the festal day, by large green boughs torn from the fir, the laurel, and the ilex. These, gathered together in a knot, with cords of woven rushes, were fixed against the pannels as high up as the arm of a man could reach; and, bending over like a plume of feathers, each nodded above some trophy of barbarian arms, the shield, the bow, the spear, the corslet, which, tastefully grouped together, hung, not without poetic meaning, in the midst of the evergreens. Above all, waved a thousand banners, and between the

trophies enormous torches shed a light redder than that of day, but scarcely less bright than noon.

Below, six long tables were covered with an immense mass of gold and silver. Cups, vases, bekers, of every form and shape, glittered on those boards; while round about, seated at easy distances, appeared all those bold and ruthless chiefs, who, under the command of a greater mind, led on the myriads of Attila to battle. There, might be seen every garb, from the furs of the extreme North to the silks and linen of the far East; and there, upon the persons of those daring leaders, blazed gems and precious stones, of which the voluptuous monarchs of Persia and of India might have been envious. There, too, were all faces, forms, and complexions, from the small-eyed Tartar of remote Thibet to the fair-haired Northman, and the blue-eyed Goth. There were the splendid features of the Georgian and Circassian hordes; the beautiful Alani, who brought a race of loveliness from the side of the Caucasus and the shores of the Caspian, and the hard-featured

Hun, or the frightful Ougour, glittering with jewels and precious stones, above the unwashed filth of his native barbarism.

All was splendour and pomp: cushions, of which luxurious Rome itself might have been proud, covered with crimson and lined with down, were spread over the seats, and supported the arms of the guests; and the bright gleam of the torches was flashed back on every side from some precious, or some glittering, object.

In the middle of the side opposite to the windows was placed a small wooden table bearing a single dish, formed of oak, and a cup of wild bull's horn: a dagger, that served for a knife, lay beside the dish, and a drawn sword of enormous weight stretched across the table. That table, with a seat of plain unadorned white wood, was placed for the use of the lord of all those around; and there he sat, the plain dark Hun, covered with no jewels, robed in no splendour, clad in the simple habit of the Scythian shepherds, but with more of the monarch in his looks than gems or diadems could have given, and with the consciousness of indis-

putable power sitting proud upon his towering brow. What were rubies or diadems to Attila? They were parcels of the dust on which he trod!

At the tables, on either hand, sat Arderic, king of the Gepidæ, Valamir, king of the Ostrogoths, Onegisus, Ellac, Edicon, Maximin, Priscus, Theodore; and at tables farther off, were placed Constantius, the Latin secretary of Attila, and Vigilius, the interpreter of Maximin's embassy. Many another king, and many another chief, was there; and nearly five hundred guests, almost all leaders of different nations, showed, by their different features and their different garbs, the extent of Attila's dominion. In the same hall, also, were collected the ambassadors from several distant countries; and there appeared humble envoys from Valentinian, emperor of the West, as well as Maximin, whose coming from the Eastern empire we have already noticed.

Viands in profusion were placed upon the table, and delicacies of every kind gratified the palate of the most luxurious: rich wines, of many a varied sort, circled in abundance; and bar-

baric music, wild, but not inharmonious, floated through the hall, mingling with, but not interrupting, the conversation of the guests. A multitude of slaves served the banquet with rapidity and care; and no one had cause to say that, in the hospitality of Attila, he had been at all neglected.

At length, an elevated seat was placed in the midst of the hall; and an old but venerable man, with long white hair and snowy beard, slowly ascended and took his place thereon, while an attendant handed him up a small rude harp. In a moment, all the Huns were silent, while, with careful hand and bent down ear, he put some of the strings of his instrument into better tune. The next moment, he looked up for a single instant, with the natural glance turned towards the sky which almost every one uses when seeking for elevated words and thoughts; and then, running his hand over the strings, he produced a wild and somewhat monotonous sound, to which he joined a rich, deep voice, a little touched, perhaps, but scarcely impaired by age. It was more a chant than a

song ; but every now and then the plain recitation ceased, and he burst forth into a strain of sweet, of solemn, or of majestic melody, as the subject of which he sung required.

The matter of his song was war and glorious deeds ; and though the tale referred to former times and other countries, when Ruga first led the conquering Huns to triumph over all other nations of the earth, yet ever and anon, with dexterous skill, he alluded to some late exploit in which the warriors around him had had a share. The noble, reckless daring of Arderic, the keen sagacious wisdom of Valamir, were mentioned with loud applause ; and many another had his share of fame ; but still, when wonderful policy, or heroic courage, or warrior skill, required some more striking and extraordinary comparison, the deeds of Attila still rose to the poet's tongue, and a new inspiration seemed to seize him, when he borrowed his illustrations from the life of the mighty man before whom he sat.

While gazing upon him, as he struck the harp, with his white beard mingling with the

strings, Theodore could have fancied that he beheld the great master of the epic, singing, amidst the isles of Greece, the marvellous deeds of her primeval warriors; and for the first time he could guess what had been the enthusiasm, what the inspiring interest, with which the voice of Homer had been heard, and which, graving each word deep on memory, had served to transmit the great first model of the poet's art to after ages from his own rude and early day.

Breathless silence hung listening to the song, except when, on some more powerful appeal to the passions of his hearers, a loud and approving shout of gratulation burst upon the poet's ear. Even the slaves paused in their office; and, when the song was over — after one moment during which not a voice was heard, — some lip broke the charmed quiet with a word of applause, and one universal cry of admiration completed the triumph of the verse.

A slave filled hastily the wine cup for Attila, and as the monarch rose from his seat gave another to the bard.

“Father of song,” said the King, “I drink

unto thee — may thy hand never lose its strength, nor thy voice its sweetness, nor the footstep of time wear the memory of mighty deeds from the tablet of thy brain !”

The cup was filled again, and to each of his most famous warriors, calling upon them by name, Attila drained the cup with some words of thanks and praise. To Maximin and Priscus, also he drank, and then with ready celerity the slaves cleared the dishes from the table, and another service as splendid as the first supplied its place.

At every course, Attila thus drank to his guests, and song and music went on, but not with the effect that they produced at first. The merriment grew higher and more loud; and Attila at length despatched a slave across the hall to bid Vigilius, the interpreter of the Eastern embassy, to advance and speak with him.

With a bending head, and air of profound reverence, the cunning Byzantine approached the King. The monarch motioned him to come nearer, and then addressed him in a low

tone, laying at the same time one finger of his sinewy hand upon the blade of the naked sword that lay beside him. What he said, no one heard; but the effect upon the countenance of Vigilius was strange and fearful. The rose at no time flourished very luxuriantly upon his cheek; but now, that cheek turned pale as death. A green and ashy hue, something even beyond the tint of death itself, spread over all his face. His eyes opened wide, his jaw dropped; and both Maximin and Theodore, whose looks were fixed upon him, thought that he must have fallen to the ground. Attila, however, bowed his head, as a signal that the interpreter might retire; and then perceiving that he could scarcely walk, the King beckoned to an attendant, saying coldly, "Lead him back to the table, or from the hall if he prefer it."

But Vigilius returned to the table, and drank cup after cup of wine. Attila looked round to Arderic with a meaning glance, and then he bade one of the slaves send in the jesters. A moment after, two of those miserable beings entered the hall, and one of those scenes of

rude and dissolute merriment ensued which makes the heart ache for human nature. Laughter rang from every part of the hall; but the face of Attila was unmoved even by a smile. He sat and heard with calm and thoughtful gravity; and though he looked round from time to time, and noticed with careful consideration his various guests, yet it is probable his mind was far away, occupied with more important interests.

At length, gliding in amongst the slaves, who, with their busy services, occupied the greater part of the space which the tables left unfilled in the centre of the hall, appeared the boy Ernac, and took his way towards the table at which his father sat. The first smile that crossed Attila's lip beamed on it as the boy appeared; and greeting him with many a fond caress, as he hung at his knee, he spoke with him for a few moments in a low tone, with an expression which showed how that stern heart was melted at the sight of tender youth. After a while, lifting his eyes, he looked towards the part of the hall at which Theodore was seated, and at

the same time spoke a few words to his son. The boy's eyes instantly followed those of his father; and bounding away as soon as they lighted upon Theodore, he was at the youth's side in a moment and greeting him, with eyes radiant from pleasure upturned towards his face, while his lips poured forth words of gratitude and gladness.

“ I thought thou hadst gone away, and left us for ever,” he said, “ though my father said that thou wouldst return. Yet, I remember, when I lost a young wolf that I had tamed, they all told me it would return, but it never came again. It was too wise,” he added, laughing, but with a gleam of intelligent light beaming from his eyes. “ It was too wise, when it had got back to its woods and to its own way of life, to come back to captivity and strange customs.”

Arderic, who sat near, laughed at the boy's simile; and Theodore, smiling also, answered, “ And so I suppose, Ernac, because we Romans say the great founder of our city was nourished by a wolf, you thought I must needs follow the

example of your wolf's whelp. But did it promise you it would return before it went?"

"No!" answered the boy, laughing; "and you did promise my father to come back:— I know that is what you mean; and I did not intend to say that you were wrong to keep your word. If my wolf had returned, I should have loved it better, even though it made no promise, because that would have showed it loved me."

"And do you love every one who loves you, Ernac?" demanded Theodore: "if so, love me, for I love you."

"And so I do, noble Theodore," answered the boy: "ungrateful should I be if I did not love you. I always love those who are brave and generous, and I shall ever love you, because you saved my life, and risked your own to save it. So I will try in return to love you better than myself, and I will ask my father to make you a king instead of me."

"But would you not wish to be a king, Ernac?" demanded Arderic. "Power is a great thing, boy! Power and command, to a brave

and wise man, are not to be despised. Would you not wish to be a king?"

"Not I!" answered the boy: "I will be a chief under my father or my brother, and lead men to battle; but I never saw that kings were happier than other men. I would rather have some one to tell me what to do, and to make sure that I did not do wrong, than have no one to guide me, and be obliged to blame myself every day. Even you, noble Arderic, you are a king, and yet you come to fight under my father's standard, and are willing to do what he commands."

A slight flush came over Arderic's cheek; but he replied, without anger, "True, Ernac; but we have not every day an Attila. The wisest, and the noblest, and the bravest, may be proud to obey him; but a weaker king might find a foe in Arderic where Attila finds a friend. With pleasure we obey those that we respect, but we spurn from us those that we despise.

"That is what I mean," said Ernac: "I would sooner obey some one whom I could love

and reverence than take all the trouble of making others respect and yield to me. No, I would rather not be a king; but I would fain see Theodore a king, and striking down enemies beneath his arm, as he struck down the wild urus."

Both Arderic and Theodore smiled, perhaps to think how readily that unambitious spirit might learn in after years the lesson of aspiring; but if they thought so they were wrong: for such as it then showed itself, was the natural moderation of the young chief's spirit; and it never became contaminated, even in mingling in scenes of strife and contention, where every one strove for dominion except himself.

They looked up, however, at the same moment; and both remarked, as their glance accidentally wandered over the opposite table, that the eyes of Ellac, the eldest son of Attila, were fixed upon them and Ernac with a look of jealous malignity, as the boy stood by them and prattled of all his fancies.

Arderic turned to Theodore, saying, in a low tone, "Were all as moderate as this fair

boy, a bitter strife might be averted from the future.”

But as Theodore was about to answer, Maximin and the rest of the Romans rose to withdraw; and knowing to what a pitch of excess the revels of the Huns were often carried, the son of Paulinus followed his countrymen from the hall.

Late and long the intoxicating juice flowed in the banquet chamber of Attila; but early on the following morning Maximin was admitted to the presence of the King, and a long audience terminated as favourably as the Roman ambassador could wish. Even Vigilius seemed to forget the fear that some casual words of Attila had called forth: and at the end of a few days, the envoy and his train took their departure from the Hunnish village, bearing with them rich presents. Several Roman captives also had been liberated at their request; but, alas! though Maximin tried eagerly to persuade Attila to free Theodore from the promise he had made to remain amongst the Huns, the monarch was, on that point, inexorable.

Some months passed by in the sports and oc-

cupations of winter, and Theodore became more and more accustomed to the manners of the barbarous nations amongst which he lived. The favour of Attila towards him was unbounded; and the commanding mind of that great conqueror was not without its effect upon the heart of Theodore. He became fond of the proximity and conversation of the Hunnish king, and felt a sort of strange and exciting pleasure in the vague sensation of awe with which Attila inspired all those who approached his presence. The monarch's kindness attached him, and his greater qualities gained the young Roman's reverence, even while the strange excess of his worse passions mingled a degree of regret in the sensations which he felt towards him.

At the same time, the favour in which Theodore stood with Attila, though it caused him some enemies, gained him many friends and courtiers; and, kind-hearted, liberal, bold, skilful, and active, possessing all those qualities, in short, which barbarous nations most admire, united to the graces and accomplishments of civilised life, Theodore won the love of many

for his own sake; so that the halls of his dwelling were far more frequently filled with the noblest and greatest of Attila's chiefs, than those of Ellac, the monarch's eldest son.

At length, as spring began again to blossom over the earth, the interpreter, Vigilius, once more appeared at the court of Attila, accompanied by his son. But then came forth the secret of his former journey, and of the words that Attila had spoken. The base intriguer was instantly seized and brought before the King, on whose right hand stood Edicon as his accuser. Around were placed the chieftains of the Hunnish nation, and, in their presence, Edicon charged the interpreter, Vigilius, with having endeavoured to seduce him, during his embassy to the court of Constantinople, to take the life of Attila on his return. Seemingly yielding to the entreaties of Vigilius and Chrysapheus, he had feigned, he said, to enter into all their plans; but immediately on reaching his native land he had revealed the whole to Attila, who, with noble magnanimity, had suffered the suborner of his subjects to come and go un-

armed under shelter of the character of Maximin the ambassador, who had been kept in ignorance of the base designs of those who sent him. But when, after having been warned that his treachery was discovered, the interpreter dared again to show his face in the country of the Huns, bearing bribes to the officers of the King, vengeance might well be demanded, and Attila determined that the accusation should be publicly made, and the crime fully punished.

Vigilius, of course, denied his crime; but when the very purse, which contained the bribe he brought to Edicon, was laid before him, and death — bitter death — was awarded by the assembled chieftains, both to himself and to the son, who was the companion of his journey and the sharer of his guilt, his courage failed; and, confessing his crime, but laying the burden thereof upon the eunuch Chrysapheus, he petitioned for life and pardon with all the eloquence of terror.

Attila gazed upon him as he would upon a writhing worm in his path; and scorning to tread on so pitiful a thing, he sent his ambassa-

dors to demand of Theodosius the head of the chief instigator of the treason meditated against him. Theodosius bought the pardon of his minions with gold wrung from his people; and Attila continued to treat with the monarch of the Eastern empire, while he prepared to turn his arms against the West.

These things, however, have been related on an eloquent, though not impartial, page; and to that I must refer those who would go deeper into the history of the time. — This is but a story of a narrower sphere.

CHAP. XII.

THE LETTERS.

HE stood alone at the door of his dwelling, gazing forth upon the summer sunset, as — reflected in rays of gold and rose colour from the summits of the mountains where the snow still lingered—it spread in floods of brightness over the western sky. During the day there had been in the royal village of the Huns a certain degree of silent activity, the coming and going of messengers here and there, the frequent gathering together in small groups, the examination of horses and arms, and the arrival of strangers from distant lands which betokened, in general, some approaching expedition. As Theodore stood and gazed out on the splendours of the dying day, he thought that ere now, on such an evening as that, he had drank draughts of deep enjoyment from that well of sweet sensations, unpolluted nature; but yet

before the sun had risen again, the bright hopes to which that exciting draught gave rise had been trampled, like flowers before a war horse, beneath the feet of Fate. Perhaps it was that the indications of some near coming change, which he had witnessed during the day, had occasioned such feelings, and called up such memories; but as he stood and gazed, a slave, from the dwelling of Attila, approached with rapid steps, and put into his hand some small leaves of vellum, rolled carefully up, and tied with waxed threads.

“From the land of the Alani,” was all that the slave said, as he delivered them, and then departed without waiting for any questions. With a beating heart Theodore opened the packet, and sitting down on a seat before his door, he read as long as the light of the declining day would permit, and then entering his dwelling, concluded his task by the lamp.

THE LETTER.

“You have not come, oh Theodore! You have not written. And yet to come was im-

possible, neither could any messenger bear me a letter hither, for the snow has lain upon the mountains deeper and more terrible than ever I thought to behold. Why then should I think of things that were impossible for you to do? It was because I longed for that which was impossible; it was because love would not be persuaded of difficulties in the way of gratification.

“ Oh how weary have been the hours, how dull, how tedious, since you left us to return to your barbarian home! Each moment has seemed to linger on the way, longer and more tardily than the rest; and the wintry year, as it went along, seemed to creep with the laggard steps of age, slowly and more slowly, as every new hour was added to the burden that it bore. Neither have the objects around me been such as to give my mind any means of withdrawing itself from that on which it dwells. The white robe of winter has covered all; clouds have hung upon the sky, and obscured the sun; the forests have disappeared beneath mountains of snow; and the grand features of the Alps them-

selves, softened and rounded by the same monotonous covering, have lost those fine and striking forms which we looked upon and admired together, when you were here.

“ During the summer, I found a thousand objects to take— No, not to take my thoughts from you, but by recalling sweet moments and beautiful scenes which we had enjoyed together, to create a bright illusion for my heart, and make me think the past not so irretrievable, the present less painful, the future more full of hopes. Then I could gaze over the lake, and mark the sinuosities of the shore, till I could have fancied myself at Salona, and mistaken that small water, with its tiny waves, for the grander and more splendid Adriatic. I could sit upon the little grassy promontory beneath the clump of pines, and think of the mound of cypresses by the banks of the Hyader; I could gaze upon the mountains, and remember blue hills that rose between us and Sirmium; and, with all, and each, and every thing, one beloved idea would mingle like sunshine, giving light and beauty to the whole, one dear form would wander by

my side through the world of imagination, rendering all harmonious by the music of his voice.

“ During the summer, I could gaze upon the flowers, I could listen to the birds, I could taste the fresh breezy air of morning, and think of you. Nothing that was sweet to mine eye, nothing that was dear to my heart, nothing that was melodious to mine ear, could I see, or know, or hear, without remembering you. But since then, the whole has changed: ere you had been gone ten days, the snow came down, covering the whole country round, even to our very door. The flowers are gone; the air of summer breathes no more; the birds are mute; no objects that we have seen together strike mine eye; no sounds that we have loved to listen to salute mine ear; and yet, day and night I think of you; but not with bright hopes or roused up memories: rather with a sad and longing regret that you are not with me, to cheer the darkened prospect, and be the sunshine of my wintry life.

“ Oh, if it be possible, come to us soon, my Theodore, come and soothe us by your presence, and direct us by your advice. There are

rumours abroad amongst the nation with which we dwell, which add difficulty and uncertainty to the heaviness of exile, and the pain of being separated from you. They say that the king of this land has offended Attila, and that the implacable monarch threatens vengeance. All hear the tidings with fear and horror; for his wrath is as unsparing as the breath of the tempest, which with one blast overthrows the weak and the strong together. Messengers are now sent to propitiate him, and they bear this letter; but Heaven knows, and Heaven only, whether any excuse will be received, any atonement permitted.

“Come to us then, my Theodore, if you can; and if you cannot come, find means to write to us speedily; inform us what we are to expect; tell us what we ought to do, for terrible, indeed, would be our situation, in the midst of a strange land, and of a people who, though kind, are but the friends of yesterday, if war were to be added to all that is already painful in our situation.

“My mother says that you will warn us of any danger, and inform us what is the best course

for us to pursue. She declares that she has the most perfect confidence in you, and that at the court of Attila you will soon learn, and be able to warn us of the result. But still I perceive that she is anxious; still I see that she sits alone, and thinks with care over the future; still I mark that she listens eagerly to every tale and rumour concerning the approaching events.

“ Ammian is as thoughtless as ever, thinking justly and wisely when he does think, but seldom giving himself the trouble to reflect at all; and yet, Theodore, it is time that he should think, for every day the change that is working itself in his form strikes me more and more; and though but a few months have passed since you saw him, I think you would say, could you behold him now, that he has made no small progress towards manhood. Nevertheless, his pleasures are still as wild, as roving, as uncertain as ever: he seems to find delight only in perils and dangers; in the rough exercise of the mountain chase, in springing from rock to rock, where even the mountain hunters tell him to beware, or in traversing the turbulent streams, bridged

by the ice, when the footing is scarcely solid enough to bear him as he passes. Then, again, when he has roamed far and wide, for many a day, he seems wearied with one kind of sport, and sits down to weave wreaths of evergreen for Eudochia's hair, or to sing us the songs that he composes in his wanderings, to the tunes that he catches up from the pipe of the mountaineers, as they sit watching their flocks in some sunny spot upon the hill-side.

“ Often, too, Theodore, when I see him and Eudochia sitting together with all that fond affection which they have shown towards each other from infancy, I think how strange, and yet how happy it would be, if the same feelings, which have sprung up in your heart and mine, from the same childish regard, should with them also arise to bind them for ever to each other. He loves her, certainly, even now, as much as he loves any thing, and he has, too, the power of loving deeply, notwithstanding all his wildness.

“ How he loved your father, Theodore ! how deeply ! how lastingly ! Even now, seldom a day passes but he thinks or speaks of Paulinus ;

and making his javelin quiver in his hand, longs to plunge it in the breast of Chrysapheus.

“ Such feelings are strange, and I know not whence they arise; yet, when I think of them, I feel as if I, too, could experience them with the same intensity. If I picture to myself any one injuring you, oh Theodore! I fancy that I, too, could hold the dagger or cast the spear. Think you not that we ought all to have been born in the old times of Rome, when men sacrificed every thing for their country, and even women shared in the same patriotic devotion. Always, Theodore, when my mind rests upon you, I imagine you overthrowing tyrants, hurling down the Tarquin, driving Appius from his polluted seat, or leading armies for the defence of Rome; and I believe that I could have stood by your side, have shared your dangers, consoled your cares, enjoyed your triumphs, or died in your defence.

“ But whither am I wandering? Far from the present scene, and present dangers, into the wide land of imagination, to encounter the chimeras of my own brain. Dangers enough and perils

now surround us, without my dreaming of others; and your Ildica will show, beloved, that she can bear with firmness, if not act with energy, in difficulties, perhaps, as great as those which her fancy paints.

“ I will not say, Come to us ! my Theodore, for that may be impossible for you to do : I will not say, Write ! for that may be equally so ; but come if you can, write if you are able. Tell us how we ought to act, and we will do it. Show us if there be really the danger which rumour teaches us to apprehend, and say what you think the best way of avoiding it !

“ My mother will not write herself, but she bids me ask, had we not better now accept the invitation of Valentinian, and retire to Rome ? We have gold enough remaining for a long time to come, and in the Western empire we have powerful friends — but then we are farther from you, beloved. Nevertheless, what you advise, that we will do.

“ Already, one of those weary seven years of your captivity has past away ; but oh ! if I look back to the time when we parted after the ter-

rible days we spent by the Danube, the space between seems interminable. Many and many a year appears crowded into that one; and yet it is vacant, filled with nothing but the tedious passing of empty hours, absent from him I love. It is like looking over the sands of the desert, one long, unvaried, interminable waste, with but one bright spot of verdure in the midst of the desolation, the few short hours that you passed with us during the autumn. Blessed and happy, indeed, are those hours, ever embalmed in memory. They were in their passing a dream of delight, and now, even in recollection, they serve as an antidote to all the cares and sorrows of the present!

“ Yet those seven years will reach their end; and I shall see you again, and once more lean my head upon your bosom, and hear your voice, and tell you all my thoughts. Let them fly, let them fly quickly, though they may be taken from the brightest season of our life; yet if the spring be without sunshine, well may we long for the summer.

“ Farewell !”

Theodore pressed the letter to his lips, to his heart. Her hand had touched it, her spirit had dictated it; and the very sight of those beloved characters was balm to his bosom. The news she told, however, was painful; the danger that she apprehended great, if the rumours on which her fears were raised had themselves any foundation in truth.

Without hesitation, Theodore took his way at once to the dwelling of Attila, and was admitted to the presence of the King.

The monarch's brow was gloomy, but he received the Roman youth with tenderness. "What wouldst thou, my son?" he said. "Thou hast had letters, I find, from the land of the Alani. Do they bear thee good tidings? Thy face is sad."

"They say that the chiefs of the Alani fear the wrath of Attila," replied Theodore boldly.

"They have cause!" answered the monarch sternly—"they have cause! but if thou wouldst send any letters back, prepare them quickly, for by to-morrow's noon the messengers return, and some of mine own accompany them."

“I would fain ask a boon,” replied Theodore anxiously. “In the land of the Alani, as thou well knowest, oh, mighty monarch, I have those whom I love better than life itself. If thine arms, victorious as they ever have been, are now destined to be turned against the Alani, I would fain visit those dear friends, and provide for their safety. They are but women and children, and cannot protect themselves.”

“Thou canst not go, my son,” replied Attila. “Thou goest with me wherever my steps are directed. Thus have I resolved for thy sake, as well as for mine own. When last thou wert absent, dangers, and well nigh death, befell thee! The same may occur again. Bleda is dead; but even for thy sake Attila could not slay a son. Thou understandest well that which I mean. Whilst thou art with me, thou art safe; but amongst distant tribes such is not the case. There, thy death might be accomplished without leaving a trace to tell me how. I know not yet whether the Alani are to be crushed as a swarm of wasps, or hived as bees. It depends upon themselves. Let them obey

Attila, and they are safe; but at all events, I go towards the western seas; and though Italy will not be visited, some of my host may sweep the mountains as they advance. It were better that they were not encountered by women—women such as these, who, I have heard from those who went with thee thither, are exceeding beautiful. Bid them remove to some other land. They dare not, I think you tell me, return to Illyria on account of the base weak Theodosius; but if thou wilt, I will issue my commands to that throned slave, to receive them with friendship and favour. He dare not disobey!”

“Thanks, oh great King!” replied Theodore; “but willingly we will not tread that land again, so long as he is emperor. Valentinian, however, in the West, offers them peace and protection. Thither will I send them, if, indeed, I may not see them ere they go. I fear not any danger to myself.”

“It must not be,” said Attila, in a tone that left no reply. “Thou must go with me; but I promise thee that, this expedition over, thou shalt have permission to visit them in that great

pile of stones which you Romans call the capital of the world, and shall abide with them longer than thou didst before. In Rome thou wilt be safe; but I could not trust thy life in barren mountains and passes which would defy our search. The word of Attila is given: thou shalt visit them in Rome! and my promise, like thine, my son, can never be violated."

"I thank thee, oh Attila," replied Theodore — "I thank thee; and feel that thou art generous. So they be safe, and free from harm, I am content to abide with thee."

"They shall be safe," replied Attila; "for my messengers to Valentinian shall command him to respect them as the children of his master; and the Alani shall have orders to guard them on their journey into the Roman state. Now hie thee hence, and write thy letter — a weary task, I should think it! What need have men with letters? Was not speech enough? But they must still add, to what the gods give them; and all their additions do but spoil Heaven's gifts."

Theodore took his leave and withdrew; and

going back to his dwelling, he called one of his attendants, saying, "Haste thee to Constantius, the Roman secretary of the King; ask him to send me parchment, and reeds and ink, or if he have no vellum, let him send papyrus."

The materials for writing were soon brought to him; and sitting down by the fresh trimmed lamp, Theodore spent the next four hours of the night in pouring forth to Ildica all the feelings of his heart.

THE REPLY.

"I have not come, oh dearest, and most beautiful, I have not sent, because to do either was impossible; and even now, my prayer has been refused, when I petitioned Attila to let me go, in order to guard thee from difficulty and danger. He gives me the means, however, of sending thee this letter; and although it will soon cause the distance between us to be increased, yet gladly and eagerly do I seize the opportunity of bidding thee fly from the land of the Alani, ere it become dangerous for thee to tarry. Fly, my Ildica, bid our mother fly,

as speedily as may be; for although the anger of Attila towards the nation with whom thou dwellest may be appeased, yet the myriads of the Huns are arming for some distant expedition, and he himself has said, that a part of the host take their way by the Norican Alps. On their course is danger and destruction; and even where they come as friends, perils not small, to all whom they approach, precede and accompany their march.

“ Oh that I could be with thee, to guide and guard thy footsteps! Oh that I could be with thee, to shelter thee in my arms, from every danger and from every injury! But it must not be: and I must bid thee go farther from me, quit the calm retreat, where even in exile we have known together some of our brightest hours of uninterrupted joy, and plunge into the crowd of a wide, vicious, luxurious city, where thousands will strive to efface the memory of the absent from thy heart; where thousands will strive to win the hand that has been promised unto me; where thousands will deem thy beauty and thy love prizes to be won by any means, conquests to be made by any falsehood.

“ Yes, my Ildica, thou must fly to Rome ; and yet I bid thee do so without one fear, that any thought or any feeling of her I love will be estranged from me by absence, that her affection will be diminished by any art of others to win it for themselves, or that her heart will not be as wholly mine when next we meet as when last we parted. If I know my Ildica aright, and judge not Rome too harshly, the capital of the empire will be but a wide desert to her, who has no feelings in common with its degenerate and voluptuous inhabitants. Ravenna itself would be worse ; and I grieve that it is so, for my Ildica’s sake, knowing well, that even were the best and the brightest of other days assembled round her, they could not steal one feeling of her heart from the first grateful object of her young but steadfast love.

“ Go, then, to Rome, my Ildica ! and, amidst the best of those who still remain, thou mayest, perhaps, find some, who will cheer thine hours during our separation, some, whose example and advice may be necessary and salutary, both to Eudochia and to Ammian. Long, I fear,

alas ! too long, will be that separation ; for although Attila has fixed a time at which I may once more fly to see thee, yet that time is named as the end of the expedition on which he is now about to set out ; and it is only in the knowledge of one all-seeing Being how long that expedition may continue, or whither it may lead.

“ Still, however, it is a bright hope, a hope that will cheer me and console me, though it may make the day seem long, and the hours fly heavily, till they dwindle down to the moment of my glad departure. Of what may intervene, I will think the best : dangers may happen, sorrows may befall ; but I will not anticipate either the one or the other, and will only think that every hour which passes only serves to bring nearer the time of our re-union.

“ What I most fear is, that the arms of Attila are about to be turned against some part of our native land ; for where indeed could he lead his hosts without meeting some portion of the Roman empire ? He demands, too, that I should accompany him ; but be assured, sweetest

Ildica, that the hand of Theodore will never be armed against the land of his fathers; and though, as a Roman, I feel that I should be justified in striking to the earth the head of a tyrant, or of a tyrant's favourite, by whom my father was unjustly doomed to die, there is a difference between the country and its oppressor. I might be a Brutus, but I would never be a Coriolanus. If I go with Attila, and if his arms are turned against the empire, I may go as a spectator to the war; but let it be remembered — and oh, Ildica, make it known, wherever a Roman ear will listen — that I go against my will, and as a captive; that I leave my sword behind me in these wars; that my shield is hung up by the hearth I quit in this barbarian land; and that if I fall amidst the events which may now ensue, I fall without dishonour.

“ Let me turn, now, to sweeter thoughts; let me think of some dearer theme. I have dreamed, I have fancied, that after this expedition is over, perchance Attila may abridge the period of my captivity, and permit me to

return, and at the altar of our God claim my Ildica as my own for ever. Oh, beloved! how my heart beats even when I think of that hour, when I think of the moment that shall make thee mine — mine beyond the power of fate itself — mine through life and through eternity — united unto me by bonds that nothing can sever — wife of my bosom — mother of my children — one, one with me in every thought, in every feeling — in hopes, in fears, in joys, and sorrows, one! Oh, Ildica! what were heaven itself, could we but think that dear bond, that tie which binds the soul itself, could be burst even by the hand of death. Oh, no! I will not believe it, that even in another life I shall not know, and see, and love thee still; that purified, perhaps, and elevated, calmed down and tranquillised from the agitating fire that thrills through every vein when I but think of thee, the same intense affection which I now feel shall not survive the tomb, and become one of the brightest parts of a brighter state of being. Yes, Ildica, yes, it shall be so! Those who doubt it, know not what love is; for oh, surely, if there

be feelings in this life at all that deserve to be immortal, it is those which would make us sacrifice life itself, and all that life can give, for another.

“Thou thinkest of me, Ildica; yes, I know thou thinkest of me. My heart is a witness for thine, that not an hour of the dull day passes without some thought of those we love; and it is strange, oh, how strange! that out of objects which have no apparent connection with such images, the idea of her I love is brought before my mind, and my heart, like the bee, draws the honey of those sweet associations from every thing it finds. If, when hunting in the neighbouring woods, the sweet breath of the wild cherry blossom is wafted past me by the wind, the image of Ildica, I know not why, rises up instantly before imagination; and every sweet perfume of the odorous flowers seems to gain an additional fragrance from the associations that they call up. If the singing of the spring birds strike mine ear, do not the tones of that dear voice come back upon memory, and thrill through my inmost heart? Every

thing is lost in thee; nothing that I admired, or loved, or delighted in before, seems now to have any separate existence in my eyes, but is all beheld with some reference to her I love.

“ Oh, Ildica ! do we not love each other better for all the anxieties and cares which have surrounded the first days of our affection? If so, let us not regret them, for they have been stern but kind-hearted friends, who may have chastised our youth, but have left us an inestimable treasure ere they departed: yes, inestimable, indeed, for there are gems to adorn existence, as well as to ornament the body; and the brightest of all the diamonds of the heart’s treasury is love such as I feel for thee.

“ Tell Flavia that I love her as her son; and tell her all I feel for thee. It will be more pleasant unto her ear than ought I could say unto herself. Bid her not mourn more than needs must be to return to Rome — the city which she knew in days of happiness — now that so much of that happiness has passed away. Bid her cheer herself with hope, for the clouds are beginning to break away; and the sun may

soon shine once more, if not for her as bright as ever, yet with a tranquil splendour that will refresh her heart.

“ Cast thine arms round Eudochia, and kiss her with love for her brother’s sake, telling her how deeply and bitterly he regrets that he is not permitted to guard her youth, and foster her beauty and her virtues, till a husband’s hand took from his own the task. Greet Ammian, too, with love, telling him that he must curb his wild spirit, and keep all his courage, and all his energies, to protect those whom God has placed under his charge, and left without other safeguard.

“ One word more, my beloved, to end this long epistle. Doubt not that at Rome you will find protection; for you have it from one whom you have seen, but hardly know — from one so mighty, however, that, alas! experience shows, even Rome herself must tremble at his frown. Attila protects you; and unto Valentinian he has sent a message to respect you and yours, as if you were his children. The weak and corrupt monarch that Rome must obey dare as

soon neglect this warning as fall upon his sword. The Alani, too, have orders to conduct you safely to the Roman territory. Oh that every step should thus bear you farther from me!

‘As I cannot see thee, as I cannot embrace thee, I would willingly write to thee for ever. But it must come to an end. Farewell, sweet Ildica! farewell, my beloved! Remember me still, as heretofore! Love me ever! Love me as well as I love thee! I ask—I can have—no better love. Farewell, again and again farewell!’

CHAP. XIII.

THE BATTLE.

WE must pass over the events of some months, and change the scene to the heart of France.

In the vast plains between the Seine and the Marne, where the eye can roam unobstructed over many a mile of open country, runs a brook of the clearest water, which, wandering on through vineyard and corn-field, joins the latter river not far from Soulanges.

At the time I speak of, however, no corn spread over that wide plain, no vines obstructed the progress of the eye, and nothing but thin low grass, which had sprung up where wheat and oats had been cut down or burned, covered the brown surface of the earth with a robe of autumnal green. A wanderer, who stooped down to bathe his weary brow in that rivulet, had gazed, before he bent his head, upon the

wide scene before his eyes, and over the whole plain not a living creature was seen to move. A raven winged its slow flight across the sky, but that was the only sign of life which the keenest eye could discover. When the wayfarer raised his head, however, and gazed again, a brown shadow seemed to lie upon the land near the horizon, and, mounting upon the base of a ruined land-mark, he saw that dull shade creeping onward towards him. He looked up to the sky to see if it were a cloud, which, borne by the wind, might interrupt the light of the sun; but over the whole heaven was spread a thin filmy vapour, which intercepted all the stronger rays.

He gazed again, and the shadow seemed to assume the form of a wide range of heathy bushes blown about by the air. Still the cloud advanced, and gradually spreading, like a high wave, seen rushing in a long bending line over the shore, it came forward across the plains, stretching out as far as the eye could reach. Distinct and more distinct at length the brown masses raised themselves above the earth, and

in the end innumerable horsemen might be seen advancing with a slow pace from the westward. A cry of terror burst from the weary wanderer, and he fled as fast as his limbs would bear him. Ere half an hour had passed, the war-horse of Attila pawed the ground beside the fallen landmark, and the myriads of the Huns spread out over all the plain.

“Let the ground before me be cleared,” cried the King; and then poising his javelin above his head, he cast it forward with prodigious force. A hundred cubits farther than any other arm could throw, it still sang on through the air, then touched the earth, and quivered in the ploughed up ground.

“There pitch my tent,” continued Attila; “there fix our camp. Turn all faces back towards the west, for Attila has retreated far enough, and here we have space to wheel our horses on the foe. Oh Theodoric! Theodoric! thou hast deceived and betrayed thy friend. I offered to make thee a king indeed, instead of a puppet in the hands of Rome; but Ætius with his loud promises, and Avitus with his fair flat-

tery, have seduced thee to the side of Attila's enemies, and ere two days are over, either he or thou must die. Had it not been for thee and thy Goths, the Romans of Gaul, like the Romans of the East, had been now crouching in trembling terror at the feet of Attila. But they shall still tremble ! Shall it not be so, oh Valamir ? Will not thy subjects die their hands in the blood of their degenerate kinsmen ? Shall it not be so, Arderic ? Will not thy Gepidæ smite the heads of the vain loquacious Franks ? Attila will beard the Roman, and even here shall be the spot. Make the camp strong, and let no one sit apart from the rest. Let the waggons be placed around, and the spaces beneath them filled up, and leave no entrance but one ; for if we destroy not this Roman army in the field, we will wait it in our camp, and by the head of my father I will not quit the land till it is dispersed. Bid the wise men and the diviners sacrifice, and consult the bones of the slain, that I may know what will be the event of to-morrow. Tell them that we fight, even if we die. Let them speak the

truth, therefore, boldly. Ha! Theodore, my son, ride hither with me."

The young Roman spurred on his horse at the monarch's command, and rode on beside him while he surveyed the field. Theodore, however, was not armed, and he only feared that Attila might be about to ask him some question in regard either to the Roman discipline, or the arrangements of his own troops for battle, to answer which he might feel incompatible with his duty to his country. But Attila, as he proceeded, gave directions to the various leaders who followed him, interrupting, from time to time, for that purpose, his conversation with the young Roman, which turned to a very different theme.

"Those diviners," he said, "I have no trust in them. Would that we had here that holy man from the mountains beyond the Teïssa! Then should we have some certainty in regard to the result of to-morrow's battle. Dost thou know, my son, what are the means which the Christian augurs use to learn the future as they do?—Valamir, my friend," he continued,

turning to the king of the Ostrogoths, "seest thou yon mound, the only one which interrupts the eye as it wanders towards the east. Though that mound be scarcely bigger than a great ant-hill, much may depend upon it—even the fate of the battle," he added, in a low voice. "We will range our host along this brook, at the distance of two hundred cubits; the hill will be before us, but let it be seized ere the strife commences.— Say, Theodore, knowest thou how the Christian augurs are accustomed to divine?"

"The Christians have no augurs, oh Attila!" replied Theodore. "There have been, and there are, prophets amongst them, to whom is revealed, by God himself, some of the events that are to come."

"That is but a pretence," answered Attila. "We judge by the bones of the victims: other nations by their entrails. Some divine by the sand, some by the lightning, some by the flight of birds; but all who have any knowledge of the future, gain it from some manifest sign. So must it be with the Christian augurs; but they

conceal their knowledge, lest others should learn it, and be as wise as they are. — Arderic, my friend and wise counsellor, place thyself early upon the right. Thou wilt never fly nor bend, I know, but let us all be calm in the hour of battle. Let not rage and rashness make us forget that victories are as often won by calm and temperate skill as by impetuous daring. Lo ! yonder come the Romans ! I would fain that they should not live another night on the same earth with Attila ; but it is too late to destroy them to-day. I will not look upon them, lest I be tempted over-much. — What say the diviners ?” he continued, turning to an attendant who came running up from a spot where a large fire had been hastily lighted.

“ I know not, mighty King !” replied the slave ; “ but the sacrifice is over, and they come to seek thee.”

Attila paused, and waited, while a crowd of Huns and slaves, all eager to hear the announcement, came forward, accompanying the diviners. They, unlike the Roman augurs of a former time, were dressed in no graceful robes ; but,

covered simply with the rude garments of the Scythians, they were only distinguished from the rest of the Huns by a wilder and fiercer appearance. As they came near, however, Attila dismounted from his horse; and the diviners approaching with less reverence than the rest of his people displayed towards him, the elder of the party addressed him boldly.

“Hear, oh Attila!” he said—“Hear what the gods pronounce by the bones of the victims! Of the result of the battle we know nothing, and therefore we cannot promise you the victory; but we know that the leader of your enemies shall die in the strife. To-morrow’s sun shall rise upon him living, and set upon him dead. We have spoken what we know.”

“Ætius shall die, then!” said Attila—“So let it be! But can ye say nothing farther? Can ye not tell which will be successful in to-morrow’s strife?”

“We had no answer,” replied the diviner with a gloomy look—“the gods left it doubtful.”

“They left it to our own valour, then!” cried Attila, in a voice of triumphant confidence.

“Our hearts and our arms shall make it no longer doubtful.—Lo! yon Romans still advance over the plain. They must not come too near us.—Arderic, let thy Gepidæ recross the stream, and insure that the enemy do not approach within a hundred bow-shots. — Theodore, wouldst thou leave me, my son?” he added, seeing the young Roman’s eyes turned with a look of natural interest upon the advancing legions of Ætius—“wouldst thou leave me, my son? If so, Attila gives thee leave to go. I fear not that there should be one brave man added to yon mighty host of cowards. I have saved thy life, I have loved thee well, I have treated thee as my child; but if thou wouldst leave Attila, at such a moment as this, thou shalt go in peace.”

Theodore sprang to the ground and kissed the hand of the monarch. “I will not quit thee, oh Attila!” he said—“I seek not to quit thee, and of all times, I would not quit thee now. Fight against my native land, I cannot; but through to-morrow’s field I will ride unarmed by the side of Attila, and defend him as far as may be from every danger in the strife. I am

grateful, oh mighty King ! for all your favours : I love you for all your kindness and all your noble qualities ; and doubt me not, I beseech you, for though I fight not on your part, none will be more faithful to you than I will. Oh, doubt me not !”

“ I do not doubt you,” answered Attila ; “ but let us to our camp.”

Difficult were it to describe, impossible to convey any adequate idea of the scene of tumult, din, and confusion, which the camp of the Huns presented during that night. The circle of waggons placed in a double row, and forming in reality a strong fortification, was nearly completed, when Attila led the way thither, and turned his steps towards his own tent. Fastened to strong stakes driven into the ground, between the inner wheels, the waggons were immovable from without, but easily turned or withdrawn from within ; and embracing an immense extent of ground, they afforded space for the mighty host, which Attila had led into the plains of Gaul.

During that night, and comprised in a space

of a few miles, more than a million of human beings, either in the Hunnish or the Roman army, prepared for battle, and panted for carnage. No still quiet followed in the train of night: the blows of the hammer and the mallet, the ringing of armour, the voices of guards and commanders, the tramp of thousands passing to and fro, the murmur of innumerable voices, the loud and ringing laugh, the war-song shouted high and strong, the sounding of trumpets, and of wild martial music, the neighing of several millions of horses*, raised a roar through the whole air, in the midst of which the sounds of an accidental conflict, that took place between the troops of Arderic and those of Theodoric, the Gothic ally of Ætius, were scarcely heard; though so fierce was the struggle for the bank of the rivulet, that fifteen thousand men were left dead within a stone's throw of the Hunnish camp.

Thus passed the night; and early on the fol-

* The armies of Attila were always followed, we are told, by an immense number of spare horses, besides those which bore his warriors, and those which were attached to the waggons.

lowing morning Attila appeared at the door of his tent, and was soon surrounded by the different leaders of the nations under his command. His countenance was serene and bright; and the attendants, who had passed the night in his tent, declared that he had slept as calmly as an infant, from the moment that he lay down his head to rest, to the moment that he woke to battle. Calmly and tranquilly he asked the tidings of the night; and in a brief conversation with the leaders, assigned to every one his proper post, and pointed out the great objects to be striven for in the coming conflict. Towards the third hour after day-break, one of the watchers before the camp of the Huns announced that they saw movements in the Roman camp; and Attila, instantly springing on his horse, led forth his troops himself through the single aperture, which had been left for that purpose. Two hours more elapsed ere the whole of that mighty host were in array; but then to any eye looking along over the wide plain, strange and fearful must have been the sight, yet grand and magnificent.

On one side of that little brook, running pure and clear, between those hostile armies—like the bright stream of divine love, pouring on its refreshing waters of peace amidst the strife and turbulence of human passions — stretched forth the host of Attila, nearly seven hundred thousand horsemen from every land, and every nation of the North. There, in the centre, under his own immediate command, appeared the dark line of dusky Huns, little embarrassed with defensive armour, but bearing the strong and pliant bow upon their shoulders, and at their side the quiver loaded with unerring arrows; the large heavy sword, too, was in the hand of each, and at many a stirrup of the wilder tribes hung as an ornament a gory human head. Far on the right appeared the Gepidæ, fairer in complexion, more bulky in limb, and more splendid in arms and apparel, but generally reputed less active, less fierce, and less persevering than the Huns. On the left, again, were seen the Ostrogoths, tall, fair, and powerful; and the intervening spaces were filled up with a thousand barbarous tribes—the Rugi, the Geloni, the

Heruli, the Scyrri, Burgundians, Turingians, and those called the Bellonoti. A thousand tongues were spoken in that host, a thousand varieties of face and garb were seen, but all were actuated by the same feelings—hatred to the Romans, and reverence for the mighty Hun.

On the other side of the brook, again, appeared, not less in number, and not less various in appearance, the vast army which Ætius had collected from the different nations that inhabited Gaul; the long-haired Frank, the blue-eyed Goth, the sturdy Armorican, the powerful, but doubtful Alan; and there, upon his right, appeared Theodoric, the wise and valiant monarch of the Visigoths, with his white hair, speaking the passing of many a careful year, and his three gallant sons, ready to obey, with the activity of youth, those directions which the wisdom of his age might dictate. In the centre were placed all the more doubtful allies of the Roman empire, mingled with such as might act as a check upon their wavering faith. On the left of the line appeared the Roman eagles, under the command of Ætius in

person. There, too, might he be seen, in the eyes of the whole army, riding from rank to rank, and with bold and cheerful words encouraging his soldiers, and exciting them to great exertion. Small in person, but graceful, well-proportioned, and active, with the lion heart of the hero, and the eagle glance of the great general, the whole aspect of Ætius breathed courage, and inspired energy. Wherever he rode, wherever he appeared, a cheerful murmur greeted him; and when at length he galloped his splendid battle-horse along the line, and riding up to Theodoric embraced the old chieftain without dismounting from his charger, a loud and universal shout burst from the army, and seemed to the ears of the Romans a presage of victory.

Calm, grave, and immovable, sat Attila upon his black charger, a stone's throw before the line of the Huns. On him every eye in his own host was turned; and in that moment of awful suspense which precedes the closing of two mighty powers in the first shock of battle, the barbarian myriads seemed to forget the

presence of their Roman adversaries in the intense interest with which they regarded their terrible leader. Armed, like themselves, with a bow upon his shoulder, and a sword in his hand, Attila sat and gazed upon his forces, turning from time to time a casual glance upon the Romans, and then looking back along the far extending line of Huns, while a scarcely perceptible smile of triumphant anticipation hung upon his lip.

He sat almost alone, for his nearest followers and most faithful friends remained a few paces behind; while, with that stern, proud glance, he ran over his often victorious bands, and seemed waiting with tranquil confidence for the approaching strife. At length, all seemed prepared on every side, and the stillness of expectation fell upon the field. It continued till it seemed as if all were afraid to break it, so deep, so profound, grew that boding silence.

Slowly turning his horse, Attila rode back towards the centre of the Hunnish cavalry, and then, with a voice so clear, so distinct, so powerful, that its deep rolling tones are said to have

reached even the Roman lines, he exclaimed, “Unconquerable race, behold your enemies! I strive not to give you confidence in me or in yourselves. Here is no new leader, no inexperienced army. Well do you know how light and empty are the arms of the Romans. They fly not with the first wound, but with the first dust of the battle! Fearing to meet you unsupported, and remembering, that where Romans have encountered Huns, the Romans have fallen like corn before the reaper, they have called to their aid degenerate tribes, who have taken shelter in the vicious provinces of Rome, after having been expelled from amongst the native Goths, from the Gepidæ, the Heruli, the Alani. These, whom we have driven from amongst us — these, weak, corrupted, degraded as they are — form the bulk, supply the strength, afford the courage of the army before you. Behold them as they stand! are they not as one of their own fields of corn, which we have a thousand times trodden down beneath our horses’ feet? We are no weak husbandmen, that we should fail to reap such a harvest as

that. On warriors, on ! Pour on upon the Alani ! Break through the degenerate Goths ! At the sound of our horses' feet, the Roman eagles, as is their custom, will take wing, and fly ; and yon dark multitude shall disappear like the mist of the morning ! Why should fortune have given unto the Huns innumerable victories, if not to crown them all with this successful day ? On, warriors, on ! Drink the blood of your enemies ! Let the wounded, in dying, strike his javelin through his foe, and no one dare to die, ere he have brought a Roman head to the ground. I tread before you the way to victory ; and if any one follow not Attila, he is already dead ! ”

A loud acclamation burst from the nearer ranks, and ran along all the line of the Huns, while even those who had not heard, poured forth their own clamorous applause of the words which they fancied had been spoken ; and the clang of arms dashed violently together, mingled with the deafening shout that rose up from the barbarian host.

“ Seize on yon hill, Valamir ! ” cried Attila,

while the roar continued: "it should have been done before."

The monarch of the Ostrogoths hastened to obey: but scarcely had his troops been put in motion, when a corresponding movement was seen upon the part of the Romans; and the terrible strife of that day — the most fierce, the most sanguinary that Europe ever has seen — was commenced by the struggle for that low hill, between the two rival tribes of Goths.

For a time the rest of both armies remained unmoved, as if spectators of the combat; but rage and emulation increased in their bosoms every moment as they gazed, and at length it became impossible for the leaders on either part to restrain in their troops the burning thirst for battle. On poured the Huns upon the Romans; on rushed the Romans on the Huns. The whirling masses of the Scythian horsemen, enveloped in a cloud of dust, from which shot forth a hail of arrows, passed through and through the ranks of the enemy, casting themselves in vain upon the firm legions of Ætius, scattering the Franks and the Sicambres, sweeping down

whole ranks of the Alani and the Goths. On, in heavy line, with their long spears lowered, poured the multitude of the Gepidæ, bearing slaughter and confusion wherever they came.

But still Theodoric and his Goths maintained the hill; still Ætius and his legions fought unconquered on the plain; still the Franks and the Alani, knowing that valour alone could save them, continued the combat against the Huns. Hour after hour passed by; rank after rank was mowed down; the rivulet, late so pure and clear, flowed onward, one unmingled stream of blood; and the feet of the Hunnish horses, as they charged again and again the confused, but unsubdued, masses of the Romans, splashed up a gory dew from the pools that lay unabsorbed upon the loamy soil. So great, so terrible was the slaughter, that the horses could scarcely keep their feet amongst the bodies of the dead and dying. Each waving sword dismissed some erring spirit to its last account; each footfall trampled on the writhing limbs of some mangled fellow-creature.

In the foremost ranks of battle, wherever

danger was pre-eminent, wherever the foes remained unbroken, wherever the carnage was most intense, there was seen Attila; and wherever he appeared, there for the time was victory obtained. Through the whole of that day, too, Theodore was by his side; and for the second time he saw upon him what his followers not unaptly called "the spirit of the battle." Though prompt and clear in every command, keen and ready to seize every advantage, the calm and moderate sternness of his demeanour was gone; and, fierce as the lion of the wilderness, rapid as the leven bolt of heaven, remorseless and unsparing as the hurricane, he swept on. No one stood before him for an instant; no one was struck a second time; but wherever an adversary crossed his path, there was left, at a single blow, a disfigured corpse upon the ground; or else his horse's feet trampled out the faint sparks that his sword had left.

Death seemed to march before him against his enemies, nor ever turned to approach himself; and only twice, when surrounded almost on

every side by the foe, could Theodore interpose to parry with an iron truncheon, which was the only weapon that he bore throughout the day, the blows of a spear and a javelin, which were aimed at the monarch's throat. The young Roman knew not that he had seen the service rendered; but at length, when the day was far spent, Ellac, his eldest son, crossed the path of the monarch, saying, "Ride not in the battle with the Roman, oh my father! He is of the country of our enemies, and may kill thee when thy back is turned. Let me slay him even now, lest the traitor destroy thee!"

"He has saved my life twice this day!" cried Attila, urging forward his horse. "Out of my way!" he continued, seeing that his son still stood before him. "Out of my way! or, by the God of battles, I will send thee to the land of spirits! Out of my way!" — and he raised his sword over his son's head, as if about to cleave him to the jaws.

Ellac saw that the moment was not his; and, reining back his horse, he sought another part of the field, while Attila pursued his career,

and strove, but strove long in vain, to obtain possession of the hill. At length, as the closing day waxed faint and dim, and the grey shade of evening, falling over the whole bloody scene, announced that the battle must soon close, or be prolonged into the night, Attila for a moment gained the summit of that long-contested eminence, and slew with his own hand the last of the Gothic warriors, whose especial charge had been to defend that post. Up to that instant he had rushed on, like a devouring flame, leaving nothing but ashes behind him; but there he suddenly paused, gazed forth upon the confused and mingled masses of the Huns and Romans, that, with equal success, and very nearly equal numbers, were seen spread over the plain for many miles around. He then lifted his eyes towards the sky, marked the dim grey that mingled with the blue, and the bright star of evening betokening that the brighter sun was gone; and with a sudden calmness said, in a low tranquil voice, "It is too late for victory to-night! It is too late!—Let the trumpets be sounded!" he continued, to some of those who

followed — “ Let the trumpets be sounded, to recall all men to the camp ! Gather together the ten nearest squadrons upon this slope ! The Romans, I think, have had enough of strife to-day, and will not seek it farther ; but they have fought well for once, and Attila must defend his own, while they seek a place of repose for the night.”

He added some farther orders ; and in a few minutes was heard, from the Hunnish camp, the sound of trumpets giving forth the peculiar notes of recall, with which the Huns and other barbarous nations were acquainted ; and, separating themselves gradually but securely, from the masses of the Romans, the various tribes which had followed Attila to that bloody battle were seen moving, in firm and regular order, towards their camp.

What would have been the result of this movement, under other circumstances, it is difficult to say, had the eyes of Ætius marked the proceedings of the Huns, or the mind of Theodoric directed the movements of the enemy ; but trampled under the horses' feet,

not far from the spot where Attila then sat, lay the disfigured body of the Gothic king, and the Roman general was far away, embarrassed with a party of the Gepidæ, by whom he had nearly been taken.

The inferior commanders of the Roman host gladly perceived that a battle, of which they were beginning to despair, was not entirely lost; and seeing the dark cloud of Huns, with which Attila on the hill covered the manœuvres of his troops, they dared not act any very vigorous part, with thinned and exhausted troops, against so bold and well prepared an enemy. The trumpets of Attila continued to sound for two hours after nightfall: his forces entered the camp unmolested, and the last of the host who quitted the battle-plain was the monarch of the Huns himself.*

* Such I believe to be the real history of this famous contest. We derive all our knowledge of the particulars from the Goths and Romans, as the Huns were not historians; or at least did not write their own version of the events in which they were engaged. Even in the present age, when both parties do not scruple to render their pretensions to success on such occasions permanent, how

often do we see a battle lost claimed by the loser as a battle won! and, of course, it is more likely to have been so when there was no check found in a counter statement. The historians, however, suffer one or two important facts to appear, which prevent us from believing that Ætius and Theodoric obtained a victory over Attila on the present occasion. In the first place, it is clear that the immense Roman and Gothic army dispersed itself immediately after the battle in which Theodoric was killed. Reasons have been assigned for this proceeding, which are in themselves improbable and unsatisfactory; but which, when coupled with the fact that Attila afterwards sacked Langres and Besançon, and with the strong reasons which exist for believing that Ætius himself retreated at once into the Lyonnaise, render the victory of the Romans somewhat more than doubtful. It seems to me very clear that the battle may have had an indecisive termination, but that Ætius, finding that the Goths and Franks could not be induced to try the fortunes of another day against Attila, retreated himself in haste towards Italy; while Attila, whose loss had been very great, proceeded by a new road towards his own land, ravaging the country, and taking several very important towns in his way. The very words of Jornandes admit that Attila was but little depressed by the event of the battle, and imply that his after-march was still, as in a career of victory. Nor is there the slightest proof, that I have been able to discover, that Ætius, as some have declared, followed the monarch of the Huns even at a distance.

If such were the way that the Romans and Goths employed a victory, they must have been moderate and generous indeed; and, under such circumstances, it might

be doubtful whether they did not treat their enemies more mildly than their friends. The character of Ætius is represented, by his panegyrists, on the present occasion (probably to screen him from the disgrace of defeat), in a very singular and not creditable point of view. He cheated both the Goths and the Franks, we are told, in order to get rid of them; and then, when left alone with Attila, escorted his great enemy quietly out of Gaul, suffering him to sack and destroy what cities he pleased as he went. Is this reasonable? Is this probable?

CHAP. XIV.

THE RETREAT.

“LET the dead be numbered !” said Attila, as he entered his tent — “Let the dead be numbered ! I have lost many of my children ! Let every chieftain of every tribe count up their numbers, and tell me how many are wanting. We are brave men, and can look our loss in the face. — Theodore, my son, I thank thee ; and I give thee leave, as a Roman, to rejoice that, for the first time, Attila has fought without winning a victory.”

Thus saying, he passed on, and Theodore turned to where his own tents were placed. It had been a day of terrible excitement ; and no man probably, in either army, had felt such strange and contending emotions as the young Roman, who, riding by the side of Attila through

that terrible conflict, exerted every energy to defend the monarch's life, and yet from his heart wished success unto his enemies. Though every moment his own person had been in danger — the more, perhaps, because he sought to take the life of none himself — yet, during the day, he had not felt even that slight exciting shade of apprehension which is rather pleasing than otherwise. His whole thoughts had been divided between Attila and the Romans. He had sought most eagerly, and he had found completely, an opportunity of proving his gratitude to the monarch of the Huns for all the great and singular favour which he had displayed towards him.

That gratitude had indeed been great. It is true, he had discovered that Attila had a personal object in the first signs of forbearance which he had shown towards him; but Theodore was not one to scan narrowly the causes of gratitude, or to weigh it out in very fine and accurate scales; and yet, though he would willingly have given his life to save that of the mighty king who had protected and befriended him, he

could not find in his heart to wish his fellow-countrymen defeated. Thus he had watched the wavering progress of the fight with an anxious and a beating heart, longing every moment to spring forward and rally the legions when he saw them shaken, or to form again the cohorts broken by the Hunnish cavalry.

The same feelings continued, and agitated him still, after he had re-entered the camp. Throughout the night a low and moaning murmur went up from the plain between the two armies ; and when Theodore, raised upon one of the waggons, gazed over that bloody field, as it lay in the tranquil moonlight, he could see amongst the piles of dead, which now broke the flat line of the land, a number of objects moving slowly, and darkening, here and there, those spots where the beams of the calm, bright planet were reflected from heaps of corslets and shining arms. The whole camp around him, except a few solitary warriors keeping guard, seemed now to have fallen sound asleep, wearied out with exertion ; and none of the noises of the preceding night broke the stillness

of the air. Horses and men, equally tired, uttered no sound; and that low moan, not unlike the sighing of a melancholy wind, was all that interrupted the silence. As Theodore gazed, a step near him made him turn; and the next moment, mounting upon the same part of the rampart on which he had raised himself, Arderic stood by his side, and gazed out in the same direction for some time without speaking.

“What can that faint moan proceed from?” said Theodore, at length. “You hear it, do you not, noble Arderic? The stream is too small to be heard here!”

“I hear it well,” answered Arderic. “It is the groaning of the many wounded, I suppose; though I never listened to such a sound before.”

“Nor ever, probably,” said Theodore, “saw such a field?”

“The world never has seen such till this day!” replied the king of the Gepidæ. “The number of the dead is fearful. I alone have lost seventy thousand men: so say the leaders

of the tribes. Did you not think the enemy seemed to have suffered as much as we had, at the close of the day?"

"Fully!" answered Theodore. "But is it possible that the sound we hear can proceed from the wounded and dying? It is horrible to think upon!"

"It may be the spirits of the unburied dead mourning over their fate," replied Arderic. "But what are yon moving objects? They must be either the Romans come to seek for their friends, or the wounded crawling about amongst the slain. Hark, that cawing! and see, they fly up for a moment into the air!—It is the ravens already at their repast. The carrion-eaters in all lands, the vulture, the worm, and the crow, have cause to be grateful to Attila. On yonder field, I should guess, must lie, either dead or wounded, some half million of men. What a banquet! See, they settle again! and now some wise crow, perched upon a Roman corslet, shall peck, unreprieved, the throat of one of those who used to call themselves the masters of the world."

“Cannot we go forth and aid the wounded?” demanded Theodore. “It is dreadful to think of leaving them to die.”

“Why so?” demanded Arderic. “They will be at rest all the sooner. Those who had any strength left have crept into the camp long ago; those who had none, are as well where they are, for neither can they serve us nor we them. It is only a pity that those ravens are not vultures, such as we have in the East: they speedily make the dead and dying, one. But, doubtless, there are wolves here too, out of the great forest behind us. They will soon clear away the car- rion. I should not wonder if that moaning, which I took for the groans of the wounded, were the well-pleased murmur of the wolves over their unexpected feast.”

“Nevertheless,” said Theodore, “I should much like to take a small body of men with me, and pick out those we can aid amongst the wounded.”

“What! and have the Romans or the Visigoths upon you, declaring that you were pil- laging the dead!” replied Arderic; “and then

I should be obliged to go out to defend you. More Goths, more Huns would come up, and a night battle would finish what a day battle has so well begun. No, no, my young friend; by my counsel and good-will, not a man shall stir forth from this camp either to-night, or to-morrow, or the day after, so long as yon army lies before us. Our loss is nearly equal now. We are in an enemy's country, where we cannot hope to increase our numbers by a man: they are at home, and probably, ere to-morrow, may receive reinforcements. Could we have crushed them in the battle of yesterday, the whole country would have been ours at once; but as we failed to do that, we must no longer leave them the advantages they possess. Here, in our camp, we must await them, where our defences are as much as half a million more warriors. They cannot starve us, for we have food enough for months, what with our horses and our cattle; and if they attack us boldly, they must be utterly defeated. No, no, Theodore, my friend, no one must leave the camp. Attila, I know, will seek to go forth and destroy them in the

open plain ; but all voices will be with me, if he asks counsel of any one : and, having asked it, he will take it if we all agree. Now let us to our tents, my friend. After all, these tents are convenient things, though when we first entered the Roman territory as enemies we had none, and despised them as idle luxuries, unworthy of a warrior. Now, not a leader amongst us but has many.”

“ So would it be, Arderic, with every other Roman luxury,” replied Theodore. “ What you contemn now, you will learn to tolerate, and at length to like.”

“ The gods forbid !” answered Arderic. “ Then will we cut our beards, and call ourselves women.”

“ The Romans have not fought like women this day, my friend,” replied Theodore.

“ True ! true !” replied the other. “ A fair reproof, Theodore ! They have fought well, and I did them injustice. Now, good night, and sleep you well. I was heated, and, to say the truth, somewhat anxious ; and I came forth for the cool air, and for something else to think

of than *to-morrow*. I have found both, and have also made up my mind, even while gazing upon that plain. Sleep you well !”

Sleep, however, was not known to the eyes of Theodore during that night. He was not yet sufficiently habituated to the mighty trade of war, to see thousands perish, and know that thousands more were lying around in agony, with a calm and unconcerned bosom. He lay down to rest his limbs, but sleep visited not his eyelids. Shortly after dawn, he rose and went out before his tent ; but the host of the Huns was already up and stirring, and multitudes covered the tops of all the waggons, gazing out over the plain, and towards the Roman encampment. Attila was still within his tent, though his battle-horse stood, caparisoned, by the side of the standard which was planted at the entrance. But Theodore was told that six or seven of the chief leaders were in council within the tent ; and, joining himself to a party of Hunnish chiefs, who stood in the open space hard by, he remained waiting, with no slight anxiety, the result of the conference.

At length the curtain of the tent was raised, and Attila, followed by his chief leaders, came forth. But little alteration was visible in his countenance, and yet that alteration had rendered the expression more harsh and severe. He was speaking when he came out, and the deep tones of his powerful voice reached to where Theodore stood.

“If it must be so,” he said, “why, let it be so. Nor do I say that your counsel is not wise and prudent, though I feel within me the power to crush yon swarm of insects, as I would emmets beneath my feet. — Still I would spare the people, if it may be so. But let it be remembered that Attila must never be defeated! It is sufficient not to have been victorious; we must die here, or conquer! Let my Huns, with their unerring bows, mount upon the ramparts of the camp. Let the other nations, my friends and allies, stand by to support them; then raise me up a funeral pile before the entrance of this tent. There shall be the bed of Attila, if fortune and the God of battle should desert him! To the ramparts, my friends, to the ramparts!

Let no man say that Attila does not yield to wise counsels, even when they are opposed to the most burning desire of his heart."

With extraordinary celerity, and perfect order, the Huns immediately spread themselves over the long line of chariots which formed the rampart of their camp; and, intermingled with the Gepidæ, and with the spearmen of Valamir, stood prepared, with their bows in their hands, and the arrow resting on the string, to send the winged death amongst the Roman legions, as soon as they should advance to the attack.

Several times during the course of the day bodies of the Roman and Gothic troops were seen whirling about over the plain, and twice a large division advanced very near the Hunnish camp, as if to feel their way towards a general attack. But a hail of arrows, darkening the sky, and carrying death and confusion into their ranks, caused them to retreat, even faster than they came; and day closed without the expected attack.

Early the next morning, a rumour became prevalent in the Hunnish camp that the Roman

army was dispersing; and on examining more accurately, it was found that an immense body of Goths, and another of Franks, had quitted the camp of Ætius before daylight that very morning. Infinite were now the conjectures throughout the barbarian host, as to what would be the conduct of Attila under the present circumstances. It was not soon decided, however. Scouts returning to the camp after having been sent forth to ascertain the movements of the enemy, and reporting that the Goths and the Franks had halted at the distance of a few leagues, after quitting the Roman army, the ramparts of the Huns remained guarded during the whole of that day; and no one was suffered to quit the camp, except some small parties, sent forth to reconnoitre.

Attila only once quitted his tent during the whole day, when the unexpected appearance of a large body of cavalry, supposed to be Goths, on the eastern side of the plain, led to the belief that a general attack was about to take place upon the camp of the Huns. They passed away, however, without approaching; and At-

tila, returning to his tent, remained in solitude during the rest of the day.

By dawn of the next morning, the Romans themselves removed to a greater distance, and towards noon an order was given for the Hunnish army to prepare to march. None knew the direction that they were about to take, none knew what purpose was in the bosom of the King; and when he himself rode forth amongst the troops, not even Arderic, his most familiar friend, was aware of the course they were about to pursue.

A few words announced the intentions of the monarch. "To the south," he said: "I will not be farther bearded by these Romans, though they be leagued with all the runaways from the hardy North. On to the south, I say! Let them attack me, if they dare!"

The tone in which he spoke was such as showed no inclination to receive counsel or follow advice, and his orders were instantly obeyed. No obstruction was offered to his march: the Roman army, as a whole, had disappeared; and though from time to time a few small bodies of

cavalry was seen upon the right of the Huns, showing that Ætius either followed or accompanied the march of the invaders, yet no attempt was made to bring on a general battle: and when, at the end of a four days' march, the Roman cohorts approached somewhat too near, they were speedily driven back by the Hunnish cavalry.

On the fifth day, towards noon, the towers of a large and important city appeared, crowning the summit of some high hills, round the basis of which the barbarian army had been winding since the morning. Massy walls, close and elevated flanking towers, built from the bowels of the rock on which they stood, announced a well defended fortress, which in the time of Rome's greatest glory might well have been looked upon as impregnable. Nevertheless, no sooner did the eyes of Attila rest upon it, after gazing over the country round, as if to ascertain its capabilities for military manœuvres, than, stretching forth his hand towards Langres, he exclaimed, "It must fall! Valamir, my friend, lead the troops to the attack. I, with

one fourth part of the army, wait upon this gentle slope for the coming of the Roman, if he dare to show himself. Let not the sun set, and see this city in the hands of the enemy.”

Langres fell, and Ætius struck no stroke to relieve it. Some of its inhabitants found means to escape into the recesses of the mountains, and some even hid themselves in various parts of the town, where they were not discovered, but all the rest perished by the sword; and the streets of Langres flowed with human blood. As was very customary with the Huns, it was fired in several places, ere they left it as night fell; but the solidity of the buildings, and the incombustible nature of the materials, saved it from any thing but partial destruction, and Attila passed on, without waiting to see that it was utterly consumed.

Besançon shared the same fate as Langres; and on the morning after its destruction, Attila gazed from the heights in the neighbourhood, and exclaimed with a glance of triumph, as he beheld no force on any side, either to watch his progress or oppose his will, “ We are not de-

feated! Let them write it in their histories, that after a pitched battle, in which five hundred thousand men were slain, Attila rode unrestrained through Gaul, and sacked two of her finest cities before the eyes of Ætius. But they will not write the truth — they will not, they dare not, lest in after ages every boy should spit at their memory. Now we may safely turn our steps towards our native land, lest the winter again set in, as it did when we were coming hither, and bind us with icy chains amidst the fastnesses of the mountains.”

The direction taken by the army was now towards the east; and quitting Gaul, Attila plunged into the passes of the Jura, pausing from time to time amidst the sweet Helvetian vallies, as if he even hoped that the Romans might follow him thither, and once more try the fortune of battle. He who through his life had gone from victory to victory, whose steps had been upon the necks of conquered nations, and whose daily food had been success, had met with a check, had encountered disappointment, had been unsuccessful, if not defeated; and he seemed to thirst for

an opportunity of wiping away the only stain, slight as it was, which a thousand battles had left upon his sword. None of his confidence had abandoned him: his reliance on his own mighty genius and daring courage was unshaken; but yet the check received in that undecided battle had wrought a change in Attila, and that change unfavourable. Ever stern and unyielding, he had now become fierce and irascible; nor was that all: many of the vices of the barbarian character, which had been kept down, and, as it were, overawed in his nature by the greater and more splendid qualities, so long as success had attended him, now seemed, like slaves on the first reverse of their master, to rise up turbulently in his bosom, and threaten to usurp the supreme control.

It was remarked, also, that Attila — fearing, perhaps, that his first want of success might have deprived him of some portion of his vast influence over the minds and hearts of his followers — had become suspicious, wily, exacting in regard to outward reverence, occasionally violent, and often intemperate. He as-

sumed, too, a greater degree of pomp and external magnificence ; as if the simple splendour of his powerful mind was sufficiently tarnished by the one slight reverse he had met with, to require the substitution of a meaner sort of majesty, to dazzle the eyes where the heart was unsatisfied.

The change, indeed, was not very great in any one particular, but still enough so, in each, to attract the attention of a person who remarked so closely as Theodore, and, in the aggregate, sufficient to strike the eyes of others. This mood, too, increased in him daily ; and as he marched onward, it drew the attention of Arderic himself.

Through those wide beautiful vallies, clad in the everlasting green with which a temperate climate and a happy soil has robed them, the Hunnish cavalry wound on, feeding their horses by the banks of the streams and lakes, which, scattered in bright confusion throughout the free Helvetian land, have rendered it, in all ages, a country of enchanted sights. Through those deep passes, too, clad with the fir and pine,

whose evergreen garmenture bore no token of the approaching autumn, the long and dusky troops of barbarian horsemen poured on, lifting, with wild enthusiastic delight, to the mountain, the rock, the rugged precipice, the variegated foliage, and all the beauties of uncultivated nature, those eyes which looked with scorn or abhorrence upon all the productions of civilised art, and on the mighty master works of the human mind.

Every now and then, however, where the beech, or the ash, or the elm, or the oak, was mingled with the unchanging trees of the mountain, the sear aspect of the withering leaves, the tints of yellow and of brown, told Theodore, but too surely, that the autumn was far advanced. The expedition of Attila had now lasted a year and nearly nine months. It was more than that since he had heard the slightest news of Ildica. It was two years since he had seen her he loved: but time could do nothing to diminish feelings, such as his; and the longing, once more to clasp her to his heart, grew daily stronger and stronger, instead of de-

creasing. He thought the rapid marches of the army slow and tedious — the way seemed long and interminable.

At length began to appear the wide plains, the dark woods, the broad rivers, which announced once more their approach to the land of the Huns. Their last three days' march, however, was through fallen and falling snow: but Theodore was not to be disheartened; and on the very day that followed their arrival on the banks of the Tibiscus, he claimed audience of Attila, and, reminding him of his promise, demanded permission to set out on his visit to Italy.

The answer was stern and decisive. "It is impossible!"

The monarch said no more, and Theodore, grieved and disappointed, waited on through a long, dark, tedious winter. With the first blossoms of the spring, however, as the young Roman sat within his dwelling, leaning his head upon his hand, and thinking of the past, the boy Ernac, now growing up in splendid beauty, ran gladly in, exclaiming, "My father calls for

you! Come, Theodore, come! Attila demands your presence; and he is in a milder mood than he has been since his return from Gaul.”

A glad hope passed through the bosom of Theodore, and, rising from his seat, he followed to the presence of the King.

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ATTILA

II.





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