

ness and an appearance of importance to objects, which from their trivial nature, could admit no such distinction.

Yet thus far we must justify Alexius, that humble as were the expedients he had recourse to, they were more useful to his empire than the measures of a more proud and high-spirited prince might have proved in the same circumstances. He was no champion to break a lance against the breastplate of his Frankish rival, the famous Bohemond of Antioch,* but there were many occasions on which he hazarded his life freely; and, so far as we can see, from a minute perusal of his achievements, the Emperor of Greece was never so dangerous, "under shield," as when any foeman desired to stop him while retreating from a conflict in which he had been worsted.

But, besides that he did not hesitate, according to the custom of the time, at least occasionally, to commit his person to the perils of close combat, Alexius also possessed such knowledge of a general's profession, as is required in our modern days. He knew how to occupy military positions to the best advantage, and often covered defeats, or improved dubious conflicts, in a manner highly to the disappointment of those who deemed that the work of war was done only on the field of battle.

If Alexius Comnenus thus understood the evolutions of war, he was still better skilled in those of politics, where, soaring far above the express purpose of his immediate negotiation, the Emperor was sure to gain some important and permanent advantage; though very often he was ultimately defeated by the unblushing fickleness, or avowed treachery of the barbarians, as the Greeks generally termed all other nations, and particularly those tribes (they can hardly be termed states) by which their own empire was surrounded.

We may conclude our brief character of Comnenus, by saying, that, had he not been called on to fill the station of a monarch, who was under the necessity of making himself dreaded, as one who was exposed to all manner of conspiracies, both in and out of his own family, he might, in all probability, have been regarded as an honest and humane prince. Certainly he showed himself a good-natured man, and dealt less in cutting off heads and extinguishing eyes, than had been the practice of his predecessors, who generally took this method of shortening the ambitious views of competitors.

It remains to be mentioned, that Alexius had his full share of the superstition of the age, which he covered with a species of hypocrisy. It is even

* Bohemond, son of Robert Guiscard, the Norman conqueror of Apulia, Calabria, and Sicily, was, at the time when the first crusade began, Count of Tarentum. Though far advanced in life, he eagerly joined the expedition of the Latins, and became Prince of Antioch. For details of his adventures, death, and extraordinary character, see Gibbon, chap. lix., and Mills' History of the Crusades, vol. i.

said, that his wife, Irene, who of course was best acquainted with the real character of the Emperor, taxed her dying husband with practising, in his last moments, the dissimulation which had been his companion during life.* He took also a deep interest in all matters respecting the Church, where heresy, which the Emperor held, or affected to hold, in great horror, appeared to him to lurk. Nor do we discover in his treatment of the Manichæans, or Paulicians, that pity for their speculative errors, which modern times might think had been well purchased by the extent of the temporal services of these unfortunate sectaries. Alexius knew no indulgence for those who misinterpreted the mysteries of the Church, or of its doctrines; and the duty of defending religion against schismatics was, in his opinion, as peremptorily demanded from him, as that of protecting the empire against the numberless tribes of barbarians who were encroaching on its boundaries on every side.

Such a mixture of sense and weakness, of meanness and dignity, of prudent discretion and poverty of spirit, which last, in the European mode of viewing things, approached to cowardice, formed the leading traits of the character of Alexius Comnenus, at a period when the fate of Greece, and all that was left in that country of art and civilization, was trembling in the balance, and likely to be saved, or lost, according to the abilities of the Emperor for playing the very difficult game which was put into his hands.

These few leading circumstances will recall, to any one who is tolerably well read in history, the peculiarities of the period at which we have found a resting-place for the foundation of our story.

CHAPTER II.

Otho.—This superb successor
Of the earth's mistress, as thou vainly speakest,
Stands midst these ages as, on the wide ocean,
The last spared fragment of a spacious land,
That in some grand and awful ministration
Of mighty nature has engulfed been,
Doth lift aloft its dark and rocky cliffs
O'er the wild waste around, and sadly frowns
In lonely majesty.

CONSTANTINE PALÆOLOGUS, Scene I.

OUR scene in the capital of the Eastern Empire opens at what is termed the Golden Gate of Constantinople; and it may be said in passing, that this splendid epithet is not so lightly bestowed as may be expected from the inflated language of the Greeks, which throws such an appearance of exaggeration about them, their buildings, and monuments.

The massive, and seemingly impregnable walls with which Constantine surrounded the city, were greatly improved and added to by Theodosius, called the Great. A triumphal arch, decorated with the architecture of a better,

* See Gibbon, chap. lvi.

though already a degenerate age, and serving, at the same time, as a useful entrance, introduced the stranger into the city. On the top, a statue of bronze represented Victory, the goddess who had inclined the scales of battle in favor of Theodosius; and, as the artist determined to be wealthy if he could not be tasteful, the gilded ornaments with which the inscriptions were set off, readily led to the popular name of the gate. Figures carved in a distant and happier period of the art, glanced from the walls, without assorting happily with the taste in which these were built. The more modern ornaments of the Golden Gate bore, at the period of our story, an aspect very different from those indicating the "conquest brought back to the city," and the "eternal peace" which the flattering inscriptions recorded as having been extorted by the sword of Theodosius. Four or five military engines, for throwing darts of the largest size, were placed upon the summit of the arch; and what had been originally designed as a specimen of architectural embellishment, was now applied to the purposes of defence.

It was the hour of evening, and the cool and refreshing breeze from the sea inclined each passenger, whose business was not of a very urgent description, to loiter on his way, and cast a glance at the romantic gateway, and the various interesting objects of nature and art, which the city of Constantinople presented, as well to the inhabitants as to strangers.*

One individual, however, seemed to indulge more wonder and curiosity than could have been expected from a native of the city, and looked upon the rarities around with a quick and startled eye, that marked an imagination awakened by sights that were new and strange. The appearance of this person bespoke a foreigner of military habits, who seemed, from his complexion, to have his birthplace far from the Grecian metropolis, whatever chance had at present brought him to the Golden Gate, or whatever place he filled in the Emperor's service.

This young man was about two-and-twenty

* The impression which the imperial city was calculated to make on such visitors as the crusaders of the West, is given by the ancient French chronicler Villehardouin, who was present at the capture of A. D. 1203. "When we had come," he says, "within three leagues, to a certain Abbey, then we could plainly survey Constantinople. There the ships and the galleys came to anchor; and much did they who had never been in that quarter before, gaze upon the city. That such a city could be in the world they had never conceived, and they were never weary of staring at the high walls and towers with which it was entirely encompassed, the rich palaces and lofty churches, of which there were so many that no one could have believed it, if he had not seen with his own eyes that city, the Queen of all cities. And know that there was not so bold a heart there, that it did not feel some terror at the strength of Constantinople."—Chap. 66.

Again,—"And now many of those of the host went to see Constantinople within, and the rich palaces and stately churches, of which it possesses so many, and the riches of the place, which are such as no other city ever equalled. I need not speak of the sanctuaries, which are as many as are in all the world beside."—Chap. 100.

years old, remarkably finely-formed and athletic—qualities well understood by the citizens of Constantinople, whose habits of frequenting the public games had taught them at least an acquaintance with the human person, and where, in the select of their own countrymen, they saw the handsomest specimens of the human race.

These were, however, not generally so tall as the stranger at the Golden Gate, while his piercing blue eyes, and the fair hair which descended from under a light helmet gaily ornamented with silver, bearing on its summit a crest resembling a dragon in the act of expanding its terrible jaws, intimated a northern descent, to which the extreme purity of his complexion also bore witness. His beauty, however, though he was eminently distinguished both in features and in person, was not liable to the charge of effeminacy. From this it was rescued, both by his strength, and by the air of confidence and self-possession with which the youth seemed to regard the wonders around him, not indicating the stupid and helpless gaze of a mind equally inexperienced, and incapable of receiving instruction, but expressing the bold intellect which at once understands the greater part of the information which it receives, and commands the spirit to toil in search of the meaning of that which it has not comprehended, or may fear it has misinterpreted. This look of awakened attention and intelligence gave interest to the young barbarian; and while the bystanders were amazed that a savage from some unknown or remote corner of the universe should possess a noble countenance bespeaking a mind so elevated, they respected him for the composure with which he witnessed so many things, the fashion, the splendor, nay, the very use of which, must have been recently new to him.

The young man's personal equipments exhibited a singular mixture of splendor and effeminacy, and enabled the experienced spectators to ascertain his nation, and the capacity in which he served. We have already mentioned the fanciful and crested helmet, which was a distinction of the foreigner, to which the reader must add in his imagination a small cuirass, or breastplate of silver, so sparingly fashioned as obviously to afford little security to the broad chest, on which it rather hung like an ornament than covered as a buckler; nor, if a well-thrown dart, or strongly-shod arrow, should alight full on this rich piece of armor, was there much hope that it could protect the bosom which it partially shielded.

From betwixt the shoulders hung down over the back what had the appearance of a bearskin; but when more closely examined, it was only a very skilful imitation of the spoils of the chase, being in reality a surcoat composed of strong shaggy silk, so woven as to exhibit, at a little distance, no inaccurate representation of a bear's hide. A light crooked sword, or scimitar, sheathed in a scabbard of gold and ivory, hung by the left side of the stranger, the ornamented hilt of which appeared much too small for the large-

jointed hand of the young Hercules who was thus gaily attired. A dress, purple in color, and sitting close to the limbs, covered the body of the soldier to a little above the knee; from thence the knees and legs were bare to the calf, to which the reticulated strings of the sandals rose from the instep, the ligatures being there fixed by a golden coin of the reigning Emperor, converted into a species of clasp for the purpose.

But a weapon which seemed more particularly adapted to the young barbarian's size, and incapable of being used by a man of less formidable limbs and sinews, was a battle-axe, the firm iron-guarded staff of which was formed of tough elm, strongly inlaid and defended with brass, while many a plate and ring were indented in the handle, to hold the wood and the steel parts together. The axe itself was composed of two blades, turning different ways, with a sharp steel spike projecting from between them. The steel part, both spike and blade, was burnished as bright as a mirror; and though its ponderous size must have been burdensome to one weaker than himself, yet the young soldier carried it as carelessly along, as if it were but a feather's weight. It was, indeed, a skilfully constructed weapon, so well balanced, that it was much lighter in striking and in recovery, than he who saw it in the hands of another could easily have believed.

The carrying arms of itself showed that the military man was a stranger. The native Greeks had that mark of a civilized people, that they never bore weapons during the time of peace, unless the wearer chanced to be numbered among those whose military profession and employment required them to be always in arms. Such soldiers by profession were easily distinguished from the peaceful citizens; and it was with some evident show of fear as well as dislike, that the passengers observed to each other, that the stranger was a Varangian, an expression which intimated a barbarian of the imperial body-guard.

To supply the deficiency of valor among his own subjects, and to procure soldiers who should be personally dependent on the Emperor, the Greek sovereigns had been, for a great many years, in the custom of maintaining, in their pay, as near their person as they could, the steady services of a select number of mercenaries in the capacity of body-guards, which were numerous enough, when their steady discipline and inflexible loyalty were taken in conjunction with their personal strength and indomitable courage, to defeat, not only any traitorous attempt on the imperial person, but to quell open rebellions, unless such were supported by a great proportion of the military force. Their pay was therefore liberal; their rank and established character for prowess gave them a degree of consideration among the people, whose reputation for valor had not for some ages stood high; and if, as foreigners, and the members of a privileged body, the Varangians were sometimes employed in arbi-

trary and unpopular services, the natives were so apt to fear, while they disliked them, that the hardy strangers disturbed themselves but little about the light in which they were regarded by the inhabitants of Constantinople. Their dress and accoutrements, while within the city, partook of the rich, or rather gaudy costume, which we have described, bearing only a sort of affected resemblance to that which the Varangians wore in their native forests. But the individuals of this select corps were, when their services were required beyond the city, furnished with armor and weapons more resembling those which they were accustomed to wield in their own country, possessing much less of the splendor of war, and a far greater portion of its effective terrors; and thus they were summoned to take the field.

This body of Varangians (which term is, according to one interpretation, merely a general expression for barbarians) was, in an early age of the empire, formed of the roving and piratical inhabitants of the north, whom a love of adventure, the greatest perhaps that ever was indulged, and a contempt of danger, which never had a parallel in the history of human nature, drove forth upon the pathless ocean. "Piracy," says Gibbon, with his usual spirit, "was the exercise, the trade, the glory, and the virtue of the Scandinavian youth. Impatient of a bleak climate and narrow limits, they started from the banquet, grasped their arms, sounded their horn, ascended their ships, and explored every coast that promised either spoil or settlement."*

The conquests made in France and Britain by these wild sea-kings, as they were called, have obscured the remembrance of other northern champions, who, long before the time of Comnenus, made excursions as far as Constantinople, and witnessed with their own eyes the wealth and the weakness of the Grecian empire itself. Numbers found their way thither through the pathless wastes of Russia; others navigated the Mediterranean in their sea-serpents, as they termed their piratical vessels. The Emperors, terrified at the appearance of these daring inhabitants of the frozen zone, had recourse to the usual policy of a rich and unwarlike people, bought with gold the service of their swords, and thus formed a corps of satellites more distinguished for valor than the famed Prætorian Bands of Rome, and, perhaps because fewer in number, unalterably loyal to their new princes.

But, at a later period of the Empire, it began to be more difficult for the Emperors to obtain recruits for their favorite and selected corps, the northern nations having now in a great measure laid aside the piratical and roving habits, which had driven their ancestors from the straits of Elnore to those of Sestos and Abydos. The corps of the Varangians must therefore have died out, or have been filled up with less worthy materials, had not the conquests made by the Normans in

* Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire; chap. lv. vol. x p. 221, 8vo edition.

the far distant west, sent to the aid of Comnenus a large body of the dispossessed inhabitants of the islands of Britain, and particularly of England, who furnished recruits to his chosen body-guard. These were, in fact, Anglo-Saxons; but, in the confused idea of geography received at the court of Constantinople, they were naturally enough called Anglo-Danes, as their native country was confounded with the Thule of the ancients, by which expression the archipelago of Zetland and Orkney is properly to be understood, though, according to the notions of the Greeks, it comprised either Denmark or Britain. The emigrants, however, spoke a language not very dissimilar to the original Varangians, and adopted the name more readily, that it seemed to remind them of their unhappy fate, the appellation being in one sense capable of being interpreted as exiles. Excepting one or two chief commanders, whom the Emperor judged worthy of such high trust, the Varangians were officered by men of their own nation; and with so many privileges, being joined by many of their countrymen from time to time, as the crusades, pilgrimages, or discontent at home, drove fresh supplies of the Anglo-Saxons, or Anglo-Danes, to the east, the Varangians subsisted in strength to the last days of the Greek empire, retaining their native language, along with the unblemished loyalty, and unabated martial spirit, which characterized their fathers.

This account of the Varangian Guard is strictly historical, and might be proved by reference to the Byzantine historians; most of whom, and also Villehardouin's account of the taking of the city of Constantinople by the Franks and Venetians, make repeated mention of this celebrated and singular body of Englishmen, forming a mercenary guard attendant on the person of the Greek Emperors.*

* Ducange has poured forth a tide of learning on this curious subject, which will be found in his Notes on Villehardouin's Constantinople under the French Emperors.—Paris, 1637, folio, p. 196. Gibbon's History may also be consulted, vol. x., p. 231.

Villehardouin, in describing the siege of Constantinople, A.D. 1203, says, "Li murs fu mult garnis d'Anglois et de Danois,"—hence the dissertation of Ducange here quoted, and several articles besides in his Glossarium, as *Varangi*, *Warengangi*, &c. The etymology of the name is left uncertain, though the German *fort-ganger*, i. e. forth-goer, wanderer, *exile*, seems the most probable. The term occurs in various Italian and Sicilian documents, anterior to the establishment of the Varangian Guards at Constantinople, and collected by Muratori: as, for instance, in an edict of one of the Lombard kings, "Omnes Warengangi, qui de exteris finibus in regni nostri finibus advenerint, sequi sub scuto potestatis nostre subdiderint, legibus nostris Longobardorum vivere debeant,"—and in another, "De Warengangis nobilibus, mediocribus, et rusticis hominibus, qui usque nunc in terrâ vestrâ fugiti sunt, habeatis eos."—Muratori, vol. ii., p. 261.

With regard to the origin of the Varangian Guard, the most distinct testimony is that of Ordericus Vitalis, who says, "When therefore the English had lost their liberty, they turned themselves with zeal to discover the means of throwing off the unaccustomed yoke. Some fled to Sueno, King of the Danes, to excite him to the recovery of the inheritance of his grand-father, Canute. Not a few fled into exile in other regions, either from the mere desire of escaping from under the Norman rule, or in the hope of acquiring wealth, and so being one day in a condi-

Having said enough to explain why an individual Varangian should be strolling about the Golden Gate, we may proceed in the story which we have commenced.

Let it not be thought extraordinary, that this soldier of the life-guard should be looked upon with some degree of curiosity by the passing citizens. It must be supposed, that from their peculiar duties, they were not encouraged to hold frequent intercourse or communication with the inhabitants; and, besides that they had duties of police occasionally to exercise amongst them, which made them generally more dreaded than beloved, they were at the same time conscious, that their high pay, splendid appointments, and immediate dependence on the Emperor, were subjects of envy to the other forces. They, therefore, kept much in the neighborhood of their own barracks, and were seldom seen straggling remote from them, unless they had a commission of government intrusted to their charge.

This being the case, it was natural that a people so curious as the Greeks should busy themselves in eyeing the stranger as he loitered in one spot, or wandered to and fro, like a man who either could not find some place which he was seeking, or had failed to meet some person with whom he had an appointment, for which the ingenuity of the passengers found a thousand different and inconsistent reasons. "A Varangian," said one citizen to another, "and upon duty—ahem! Then I presume to say in your ear—"

"What do you imagine is his object?" inquired the party to whom this information was addressed.

"Gods and goddesses! do you think I can tell you? but suppose that he is lurking here to hear what folk say of the Emperor," answered the *guidannone* of Constantinople.

"That is not likely," said the querist; "these Varangians do not speak our language, and are not extremely well fitted for spies, since few of them pretend to any intelligible notion of the Grecian tongue. It is not likely, I think, that the Emperor would employ as a spy a man who did not understand the language of the country."

"But if there are, as all men fancy," answered the politician, "persons among these barbarian soldiers who can speak almost all languages, you

tion to renew the struggle at home. Some of these, in the bloom of youth, penetrated into a far distant land, and offered themselves to the military service of the Constantinopolitan Emperor—that wise prince, against whom Robert Guiscard, Duke of Apulia, had then raised all his forces. The English exiles were favorably received, and opposed in battle to the Normans, for whose encounter the Greeks themselves were too weak. Alexius began to build a town for the English, a little above Constantinople, at a place called *Chevelo*, but the trouble of the Normans from Sicily still increasing, he soon recalled them to the capital, and intrusted the principal palace with all its treasure to their keeping. This was the method in which the Saxon English found their way to Ionia, where they still remain, highly valued by the Emperor and the people."—Book iv., p. 508.

will admit that such are excellently qualified for seeing clearly around them, since they possess the talent of beholding and reporting, while no one has the slightest idea of suspecting them."

"It may well be," replied his companion; "but since we see so clearly the fox's foot and paws protruding from beneath the seeming sheep's fleece, or rather, by your leave, the bear's hide yonder, had we not better be jogging homeward, ere it be pretended we have insulted a Varangian Guard?"

This surmise of danger insinuated by the last speaker, who was a much older and more experienced politician than his friend, determined both on a hasty retreat. They adjusted their cloaks, caught hold of each other's arm, and, speaking fast and thick as they started new subjects of suspicion, they sped, close coupled together, towards their habitations, in a different and distant quarter of the town.

In the meantime, the sunset was now over; and the long shadows of the walls, bulwarks, and arches, were projecting from the westward in deeper and blacker shade. The Varangian seemed tired of the short and lingering circle in which he had now trodden for more than an hour, and in which he still loitered like an unliberated spirit, which cannot leave the haunted spot till licensed by the spell which has brought it thither. Even so the barbarian, casting an impatient glance to the sun, which was setting in a blaze of light behind a rich grove of cypress-trees, looked for some accommodation on the benches of stone which were placed under shadow of the triumphal arch of Theodosius, drew the axe, which was his principal weapon, close to his side, wrapped his cloak about him, and, though his dress was not in other respects a fit attire for slumber, yet in less than three minutes he was fast asleep. The irresistible impulse which induced him to seek for repose in a place very indifferently fitted for the purpose, might be weariness consequent upon the military vigils, which had proved a part of his duty on the preceding evening. At the same time, his spirit was so alive within him, even while he gave way to this transient fit of oblivion, that he remained almost awake even with shut eyes, and no bound seemed to sleep more lightly than our Anglo-Saxon at the Golden Gate of Constantinople.

And now the slumberer, as the loiterer had been before, was the subject of observation to the accidental passengers. Two men entered the porch in company. One was a somewhat slight-made, but alert-looking man, by name Lysimachus, and by profession a designer. A roll of paper in his hand, with a little satchel containing a few chalks, or pencils, completed his stock in trade; and his acquaintance with the remains of ancient art gave him a power of talking on the subject, which unfortunately bore more than due proportion to his talents of execution. His companion, a magnificent-looking

man in form, and so far resembling the young barbarian, but more clownish and peasant-like in the expression of his features, was Stephanos the wrestler, well known in Palestra.

"Stop here, my friend," said the artist, producing his pencils, "till I make a sketch for my youthful Hercules."

"I thought Hercules had been a Greek," said the wrestler. "This sleeping animal is a barbarian."

The tone intimated some offence, and the designer hastened to soothe the displeasure which he had thoughtlessly excited. Stephanos, known by the surname of Castor, who was highly distinguished for gymnastic exercises, was a sort of patron to the little artist, and not unlikely by his own reputation to bring the talents of his friend into notice.

"Beauty and strength," said the adroit artist, "are of no particular nation; and may our Muse never deign me her prize, but it is my greatest pleasure to compare them, as existing in the un-cultivated savage of the north, and when they are found in the darling of an enlightened people, who has added the height of gymnastic skill to the most distinguished natural qualities, such as we can now only see in the works of Phidias and Praxiteles—or in our living model of the gymnastic champions of antiquity."

"Nay, I acknowledge that the Varangian is a proper man," said the athletic hero, softening his tone; "but the poor savage hath not, perhaps, in his lifetime, had a single drop of oil on his bosom! Hercules instituted the Isthmian Games—"

"But hold! what sleeps he with, wrapped so close in his bearskin?" said the artist. "Is it a club?"

"Away, away, my friend!" cried Stephanos, as they looked closer on the sleeper. "Do you not know that it is the instrument of their barbarous office? They do not war with swords or lances, as if destined to attack men of flesh and blood; but with maces and axes, as if they were to hack limbs formed of stone, and sinews of oak. I will wager my crown [of withered parsley] that he lies here to arrest some distinguished commander who has offended the government! He would not have been thus formidably armed otherwise.—Away, away, good Lysimachus; let us respect the slumbers of the bear."

So saying, the champion of the Palestra made off with less apparent confidence than his size and strength might have inspired.

Others, now thinly straggling, passed onward as the evening closed, and the shadows of the cypress-trees fell darker around. Two females of the lower rank cast their eyes on the sleeper. "Holy Maria!" said one, "if he does not put me in mind of the Eastern tale, how a Genie brought a gallant young prince from his nuptial chamber in Egypt, and left him sleeping at the gate of Damascus. I will awake the poor lamb, lest he catch harm from the night dew."

"Harm?" answered the older and crosser-looking woman. "Ay, such harm as the cold water of the Cydnus does to the wild-swan. A lamb?—ay, forsooth! Why, he's a wolf or a bear, at least a Varangian, and no modest matron would exchange a word with such an unmannered barbarian. I'll tell you what one of these English Danes did to me—"

So saying, she drew on her companion, who followed with some reluctance, seeming to listen to her gabble, while she looked back upon the sleeper.

The total disappearance of the sun, and nearly at the same time the departure of the twilight, which lasts so short time in that tropical region—one of the few advantages which a more temperate climate possesses over it, being the longer continuance of that sweet and placid light—gave signal to the wanderers of the city to shut the folding leaves of the Golden Gate, leaving a wicket lightly bolted for the passage of those whom business might have detained too late without the walls, and indeed for all who chose to pay a small coin. The position and apparent insensibility of the Varangian did not escape those who had charge of the gate, of whom there was a strong guard, which belonged to the ordinary Greek forces.

"By Castor and by Pollux," said the centurion—for the Greeks swore by the ancient deities, although they no longer worshipped them, and preserved those military distinctions with which "the steady Romans shook the world," although they were altogether degenerated from their original manners—"By Castor and Pollux, comrades, we cannot gather gold in this gate, according as its legend tells us; yet it will be our fault if we cannot glean a goodly crop of silver; and though the golden age be the most ancient and honorable, yet in this degenerate time it is much if we see a glimpse of the inferior metal."

"Unworthy are we to follow the noble centurion Harpax," answered one of the soldiers of the watch, who showed the shaven head and the single tuft* of a Mussulman, "if we do not hold silver a sufficient cause to bestir ourselves, when there has been no gold to be had—as, by the faith of an honest man, I think we can hardly tell its color—whether out of the imperial treasury, or obtained at the expense of individuals, for many long moons!"

"But this silver," said the centurion, "thou shalt see with thine own eye, and hear it ring a knell in the purse which holds our common stock."

"Which *did* hold it, as thou wouldst say, most valiant commander," replied the inferior warder; "but what that purse holds now, save a few miserable oboli for purchasing certain pickled pot-herbs and salt fish, to relish our allowance of stummed wine, I cannot tell, but willingly give my share of the contents to the devil, if either

* One tuft is left on the shaven crown of the Moslem, for the angel to grasp by when conveying him to Paradise.

purse or platter exhibits symptom of any age richer than the age of copper."

"I will replenish our treasury," said the centurion, "were our stock yet lower than it is. Stand up close by the wicket, my masters. Be-think you we are the Imperial Guards, or the Guards of the Imperial City, it is all one, and let us have no man rush past us on a sudden,—and now that we are on our guard, I will unfold to you—But stop," said the valiant centurion, "are we all here true brothers? Do all well understand the ancient and laudable customs of our watch—keeping all things secret which concern the profit and advantage of this our vigil, and aiding and abetting the common cause, without information or treachery?"

"You are strangely suspicious to-night," answered the sentinel. "Methinks we have stood by you without tale-telling in matters which were more weighty. Have you forgot the passage of the jeweller—which was neither the gold nor silver age; but if there were a diamond one—"

"Peace, good Ismail the Infidel," said the centurion,—for, I thank Heaven, we are of all religions, so it is to be hoped we must have the true one amongst us,—Peace, I say; it is unnecessary to prove thou canst keep new secrets, by ripping up old ones.—Come hither—look through the wicket to the stone bench, on the shady side of the grand porch—tell me, old lad, what dost thou see there?"

"A man asleep," said Ismail. "By Heaven, I think from what I can see by the moonlight, that it is one of those barbarians, one of those island dogs, whom the Emperor sets such store by!"

"And can thy fertile brain," said the centurion, "spin nothing out of his present situation, tending towards our advantage?"

"Why, ay," said Ismail; "they have large pay, though they are not only barbarians, but pagan dogs, in comparison with us Moslems and Nazarenes. That fellow hath besotted himself with liquor, and hath not found his way home to his barracks in good time. He will be severely punished, unless we consent to admit him; and to prevail on us to do so, he must empty the contents of his girdle."

"That, at least—that, at least," answered the soldiers of the city watch, but carefully suppressing their voices, though they spoke in an eager tone.

"And is that all that you would make of such an opportunity?" said Harpax, scornfully. "No, no, comrades. If this outlandish animal indeed escape us, he must at least leave his fleece behind. See you not the gleams from his head piece and his cuirass? I presume these betoken substantial silver, though it may be of the thinnest. There lies the silver mine I spoke of, ready to enrich the dexterous hands who shall labor it."

"But," said timidly a young Greek, a companion of their watch lately enlisted in the corps, and unacquainted with their habits, "still, this

barbarian, as you call him, is a soldier of the Emperor; and if we are convicted of depriving him of his arms, we shall be justly punished for a military crime."

"Hear to a new Lycurgus come to teach us our duty!" said the centurion. "Learn first, young man, that the metropolitan cohort never can commit a crime; and learn next, of course, that they can never be convicted of one. Suppose we found a straggling barbarian, a Varangian, like this slumberer, perhaps a Frank, or some other of these foreigners bearing unpronounceable names, while they dishonor us by putting on the arms and apparel of the real Roman soldier, are we, placed to defend an important post, to admit a man so suspicious within our postern, when the event may probably be to betray both the Golden Gate and the hearts of gold who guard it,—to have the one seized, and the throats of the others handsomely cut?"

"Keep him without side the gate, then," replied the novice, "if you think him so dangerous. For my part, I should not fear him, were he deprived of that huge double-edged axe, which gleams from under his cloak, having a more deadly glare than the comet which astrologers prophesy such strange things of."

"Nay, then, we agree together," answered Harpax, "and you speak like a youth of modesty and sense: and I promise you the state will lose nothing in the despoiling of this same barbarian. Each of these savages hath a double set of accoutrements, the one wrought with gold, silver inlaid work, and ivory, as becomes their duties in the prince's household; the other fashioned of triple steel, strong, weighty, and irresistible. Now, in taking from this suspicious character his silver helmet and cuirass, you reduce him to his proper weapons, and you will see him start up in arms fit for duty."

"Yes," said the novice; "but I do not see that this reasoning will do more than warrant our stripping the Varangian of his armor, to be afterwards heedfully returned to him on the morrow, if he prove a true man. How, I know not, but I had adopted some idea that it was to be confiscated for our joint behoof."

"Unquestionably," said Harpax; "for such has been the rule of our watch ever since the days of the excellent centurion Sisyphus, in whose time it first was determined, that all contraband commodities or suspicious weapons, or the like, which were brought into the city during the night-watch, should be uniformly forfeited to the use of the soldiery of the guard; and where the Emperor finds the goods or arms unjustly seized, I hope he is rich enough to make it up to the sufferer."

"But still—but still," said Sebastes of Mitylene, the young Greek aforesaid, "were the Emperor to discover—"

"Ass!" replied Harpax, "he cannot discover, if he had all the eyes of Argus's tail.—Here are twelve of us sworn according to the

rules of the watch, to abide in the same story. Here is a barbarian, who, if he remembers anything of the matter—which I greatly doubt—his choice of a lodging arguing his familiarity with the wine-pot—tells but a wild tale of losing his armor, which we, my masters" (looking round to his companions), "deny stoutly—I hope we have courage enough for that—and which party will be believed? The companions of the watch surely!"

"Quite the contrary," said Sebastes. "I was born at a distance from hence; yet even in the island of Mitylene, a rumor had reached me that the cavaliers of the city-guard of Constantinople were so accomplished in falsehood, that the oath of a single barbarian would outweigh the Christian oath of the whole body, if Christians some of them are—for example, this dark man with a single tuft on his head."

"And if it were even so," said the centurion, with a gloomy and sinister look, "there is another way of making the transaction a safe one."

Sebastes, fixing his eye on his commander, moved his hand to the hilt of an Eastern poniard which he wore, as if to penetrate his exact meaning. The centurion nodded in acquiescence.

"Young as I am," said Sebastes, "I have been already a pirate five years at sea, and a robber three years now in the hills, and it is the first time I have seen or heard a man hesitate, in such a case, to take the only part which is worth a brave man's while to resort to in a pressing affair."

Harpax struck his hand into that of the soldier, as sharing his uncompromising sentiments; but when he spoke, it was in a tremulous voice.

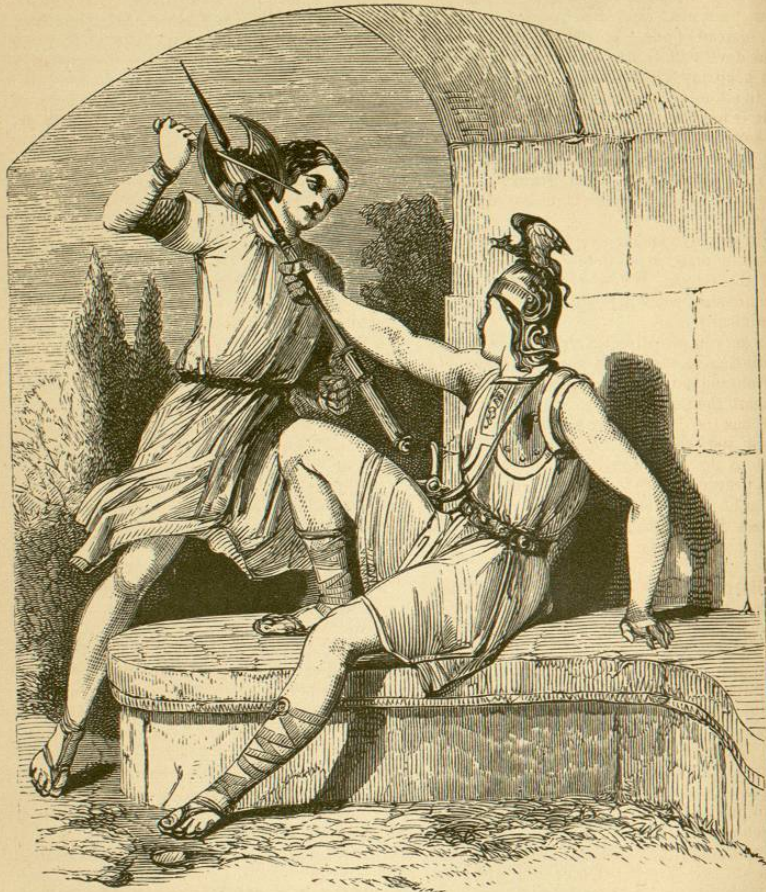
"How shall we deal with him?" said he to Sebastes, who, from the most raw recruit in the corps, had now risen to the highest place in his estimation.

"Any how," returned the islander; "I see bows here and shafts, and if no other person can use them—"

"They are not," said the centurion, "the regular arms of our corps."

"The fitter you to guard the gates of a city," said the young soldier, with a horse-laugh, which had something insulting in it. "Well—be it so. I can shoot like a Scythian," he proceeded; "nod but with your head, one shaft shall crash among the splinters of his skull and his brains; the second shall quiver in his heart."

"Bravo, my noble comrade!" said Harpax, in a tone of affected rapture, always lowering his voice, however, as respecting the slumbers of the Varangian. "Such were the robbers of ancient days, the Diomedes, Corynetes, Synnes, Scyrons, Procrustes, whom it required demigods to bring to what was miscalled justice, and whose compeers and fellows will remain masters of the continent and isles of Greece, until Hercules and Theseus shall again appear upon earth



"At the moment the blow was rushing to its descent, the Varangian started up at once, arrested the armed hand of the assassin by striking it up with the head of his battle-axe."
Count Robert of Paris, chap. II.

Nevertheless, shoot not, my valiant Sebastes—draw not the bow, my invaluable Mitylenian; you may wound and not kill."

"I am little wont to do so," said Sebastes, again repeating the hoarse, chuckling, discordant laugh, which grated upon the ears of the centurion, though he could hardly tell the reason why it was so uncommonly unpleasant.

"If I look not about me," was his internal reflection, "we shall have two centurions of the watch, instead of one. This Mitylenian, or be he who the devil will, is a bow's length beyond me. I must keep my eye on him." He then spoke aloud, in a tone of authority. "But come, young man, it is hard to discourage a young beginner. If you have been such a rover of wood and river as you tell us of, you know how to play the Sicarius; there lies your object, drunk or asleep we know not which;—you will deal with him in either case."

"Will you give me no odds to stab a stupefied or drunken man, most noble centurion?" answered the Greek. "You would perhaps love the commission yourself?" he continued, somewhat ironically.

"Do as you are directed, friend," said Harpax, pointing to the turret staircase which led down from the battlement to the arched entrance underneath the porch.

"He has the true cat-like stealthy pace," half muttered the centurion, as his sentinel descended to do such a crime as he was posted here to prevent. "This cockerel's comb must be cut, or he will become king of the roost. But let us see if his hand be as resolute as his tongue; then we will consider what turn to give to the conclusion."

As Harpax spoke between his teeth, and rather to himself than any of his companions, the Mitylenian emerged from under the archway, treading on tiptoe, yet swiftly, with an admirable mixture of silence and celerity. His poniard, drawn as he descended, gleamed in his hand, which was held a little behind the rest of his person, so as to conceal it. The assassin hovered less than an instant over the sleeper, as if to mark the interval between the ill-fated silver corslet, and the body which it was designed to protect, when, at the instant the blow was rushing to its descent, the Varangian started up at once, arrested the armed hand of the assassin, by striking it upwards with the head of his battle-axe; and while he thus parried the intended stab, struck the Greek a blow heavier than Sebastes had ever learned at the Pancration, which left him scarce the power to cry help to his comrades on the battlements. They saw what had happened, however, and beheld the barbarian set his foot on their companion, and brandish high his formidable weapon, the whistling sound of which made the old arch ring ominously, while he paused an instant, with his weapon upheaved, ere he gave the finishing blow to his enemy. The warders made a bustle,

as if some of them would descend to the assistance of Sebastes, without, however, appearing very eager to do so, when Harpax, in a rapid whisper, commanded them to stand fast.

"Each man to his place," he said, "happen what may. Yonder comes a captain of the guard—the secret is our own, if the savage has killed the Mitylenian, as I well trust, for he stirs neither hand nor foot. But if he lives, my comrades, make hard your faces as flints—he is but one man, we are twelve. We know nothing of his purpose, save that he went to see wherefore the barbarian slept so near the post."

While the centurion thus bruited his purpose in busy insinuation to the companions of his watch, the stately figure of a tall soldier, richly armed, and presenting a lofty crest, which glistened as he stepped from the open moonlight into the shade of the vault, became visible beneath. A whisper passed among the warders on the top of the gate.

"Draw bolt, shut gate, come of the Mitylenian what will," said the centurion; "we are lost men if we own him.—Here comes the chief of the Varangian axes, the Follower himself."

"Well, Hereward," said the officer who came last upon the scene, in a sort of *lingua Franca*, generally used by the barbarians of the guard, "hast thou caught a night-hawk?"

"Ay, by Saint George!" answered the soldier; "and yet, in my country, we would call him but a kite."

"What is he?" said the leader.

"He will tell you that himself," replied the Varangian, "when I take my grasp from his windpipe."

"Let him go, then," said the officer.

The Englishman did as he was commanded; but escaping as soon as he felt himself at liberty, with an alertness which could scarce have been anticipated, the Mitylenian rushed out at the arch, and, availing himself of the complicated ornaments which had originally graced the exterior of the gateway, he fled around buttress and projection, closely pursued by the Varangian, who, cumbered with his armor, was hardly a match in the course for the light-footed Grecian, as he dodged his pursuer from one skulking-place to another. The officer laughed heartily, as the two figures, like shadows appearing, and disappearing as suddenly, held rapid flight and chase around the arch of Theodosius.

"By Hercules! it is Hector pursued round the walls of Ilion by Achilles," said the officer; "but my Pelides will scarce overtake the son of Priam. What, ho! goddess-born—son of the white-footed Thetis!—But the allusion is lost on the poor savage—Hollo, Hereward! I say, stop—know thine own most barbarous name." These last words were muttered; then raising his voice, "Do not out-run thy wind, good Hereward. Thou mayst have more occasion for breath to-night."

"If it had been my leader's will," answered the Varangian, coming back in sulky mood, and

breathing like one who had been at the top of his speed, "I would have had him as fast as ever greyhound held here, ere I left the chase. Were it not for this foolish armor, which encumbers without defending one, I would not have made two bounds without taking him by the throat."

"As well, as it is," said the officer, who was, in fact, the Acoulonthos, or *Follower*, so called because it was the duty of this highly-trusted officer of the Varangian Guards constantly to attend on the person of the Emperor. "But let us now see by what means we are to regain our entrance through the gate? for if, as I suspect, it was one of those warders who was willing to have played thee a trick, his companions may not let us enter willingly."

"And is it not," said the Varangian, "your Valor's duty to probe this want of discipline to the bottom?"

"Hush thee here, my simple-minded savage! I have often told you, most ignorant Hereward, that the skulls of those who come from your cold and muddy Beotia of the North, are fitter to bear out twenty blows with a sledge-hammer, than turn off one witty or ingenious idea. But follow me, Hereward, and although I am aware that showing the fine meshes of Grecian policy to the coarse eye of an unpractised barbarian like thee, is much like casting pearls before swine, a thing forbidden in the Blessed Gospel, yet, as thou hast so good a heart, and so trusty, as is scarce to be met with among my Varangians themselves, I care not if, while thou art in attendance on my person, I endeavor to indoctrinate thee in some of that policy by which I myself—the *Follower*—the chief of the Varangians, and therefore erected by their axes into the most valiant of the valiant, am content to guide myself, although every way qualified to bear me through the cross currents of the court by main pull of oar and press of sail—a condescension in me, to do that by policy, which no man in this imperial court, the chosen sphere of superior wits, could so well accomplish by open force as myself. What think'st thou, good savage?"

"I know," answered the Varangian, who walked about a step and a half behind his leader, like an orderly of the present day behind his officer's shoulder, "I should be sorry to trouble my head with what I could do by my hands at once."

"Did I not say so?" replied the *Follower*, who had now for some minutes led the way from the Golden-Gate, and was seen gliding along the outside of the moonlight walls, as if seeking an entrance elsewhere. "Lo, such is the stuff of what you call your head is made! Your hands and arms are perfect Achitophels, compared to it. Harken to me, thou most ignorant of all animals,—but, for that very reason, thou stoutest of confidants, and bravest of soldiers.—I will tell thee the very riddle of this night-work, and yet, even then I doubt if thou canst understand me."

"It is my present duty to try to comprehend your Valor," said the Varangian—"I would say your policy, since you condescend to expound it to me. As for your valor," he added, "I should be unlucky if I did not think I understood its length and breadth already."

The Greek general colored a little, but replied, with unaltered voice, "True, good Hereward. We have seen each other in battle."

Hereward here could not suppress a short cough, which to those grammarians of the day who were skillful in applying the use of accents, would have implied no peculiar eulogium on his officer's military bravery. Indeed, during their whole intercourse, the conversation of the General, in spite of his tone of affected importance and superiority, displayed an obvious respect for his companion, as one who, in many points of action, might, if brought to the test, prove a more effective soldier than himself. On the other hand, when the powerful Northern warrior replied, although it was with all observance of discipline and duty, yet the discussion might sometimes resemble that between an ignorant macaroni officer, before the Duke of York's reformation of the British army, and a steady sergeant of the regiment in which they both served. There was a consciousness of superiority, disguised by external respect, and half admitted by the leader.

"You will grant me, my simple friend," continued the chief, in the same tone as before, "in order to lead thee by a short passage into the deepest principle of policy which pervades this same court of Constantinople, that the favor of the Emperor"—(here the officer raised his casque, and the soldier made a semblance of doing so also)—"who (be the place where he puts his foot sacred!) is the vivifying principle of the sphere in which we live, as the sun itself is that of humanity—"

"I have heard something like this said by our tribunes," said the Varangian.

"It is their duty so to instruct you," answered the leader; "and I trust that the priests also, in their sphere, forget not to teach my Varangians their constant service to their Emperor."

"They do not omit it," replied the soldier, "though we of the exiles know our duty."

"God forbid I should doubt it," said the commander of the battle-axes. "All I mean is to make thee understand, my dear Hereward, that as there are, though perhaps such do not exist in thy dark and gloomy climate, a race of insects which are born in the first rays of the morning, and expire with those of sunset (thence called by us ephemera, as enduring one day only), such is the case of a favorite at court, while enjoying the smiles of the most sacred Emperor. And happy is he whose favor, rising as the person of the sovereign emerges from the level space which extends around the throne, displays itself in the first imperial blaze of glory, and who, keeping his post during the meridian splendor of the

crown, has only the fate to disappear and die with the last beam of imperial brightness."

"Your Valor," said the islander, "speaks higher language than my Northern wits are able to comprehend. Only, methinks, rather than part with life at the sunset, I would, since insect I must needs be, become a moth for two or three dark hours."

"Such is the sordid desire of the vulgar, Hereward," answered the *Follower* with assumed superiority, "who are contented to enjoy life, lacking distinction; whereas we, on the other hand, we of choicer quality, who form the nearest and innermost circle around the Imperial Alexius, in which he himself forms the central point, are watchful, to woman's jealousy, of the distribution of his favors, and omit no opportunity, whether by leaguings with or against each other, to recommend ourselves individually to the peculiar light of his countenance."

"I think I comprehend what you mean," said the guardsman; "although as for living such a life of intrigue—but that matters not."

"It does indeed matter not, my good Hereward," said his officer, "and thou art lucky in having no appetite for the life I have described. Yet I have seen barbarians rise high in the empire, and if they have not altogether the flexibility, the malleability, as it is called—that happy ductility which can give way to circumstances, I have yet known those of barbaric tribes, especially if bred up at court from their youth, who joined to a limited portion of this flexible quality enough of a certain tough durability of temper, which, if it does not excel in availing itself of opportunity, has no contemptible talent at creating it. But letting comparisons pass, it follows, from this emulation of glory, that is, of royal favor, amongst the servants of the imperial and most sacred court, that each is desirous of distinguishing himself by showing to the Emperor, not only that he fully understands the duties of his own employments, but that he is capable, in case of necessity, of discharging those of others."

"I understand," said the Saxon; "and thence it happens that the under ministers, soldiers, and assistants of the great crown-officers, are perpetually engaged, not in aiding each other, but in acting as spies on their neighbors' actions?"

"Even so," answered the commander; "it is but few days since I had a disagreeable instance of it. Every one, however dull in the intellect, hath understood thus much, that the great Protospathaire,* which title thou knowest signifies the General-in-chief of the forces of the empire, hath me at hatred, because I am the leader of those redoubtable Varangians, who enjoy, and well deserve, privileges exempting them from the absolute command which he possesses over all other corps of the army—an authority which becomes Nicanor, notwithstanding the victori-

* Literally, the First Swordsman.

ous sound of his name, nearly as well as a war-saddle would become a bullock."

"How!" said the Varangian, "does the Protospathaire pretend to any authority over the noble exiles?—By the red dragon, under which we live and die, we will obey no man alive but Alexius Comnenus himself, and our own oficers!"

"Rightly and bravely resolved," said the leader; "but, my good Hereward, let not your just indignation hurry you so far as to name the most sacred Emperor, without raising your hand to your casque, and adding the epithets of his lofty rank."

"I will raise my hand often enough and high enough," said the Norseman, "when the Emperor's service requires it."

"I dare be sworn thou wilt," said Achilles Tattius, the commander of the Varangian Imperial Body Guard, who thought the time was unfavorable for distinguishing himself by insisting on that exact observance of etiquette, which was one of his great pretensions to the name of a soldier. "Yet were it not for the constant vigilance of your leader, my child, the noble Varangians would be trode down, in the common mass of the army, with the heathen cohorts of Huns, Scythians, or those turbaned infidels the renegade Turks; and even for this is your commander here in peril, because he vindicates his axe-men as worthy of being prized above the paltry shafts of the Eastern tribes and the javelins of the Moors, which are only fit to be playthings for children."

"You are exposed to no danger," said the soldier, closing up to Achilles in a confidential manner, "from which these axes can protect you."

"Do I not know it?" said Achilles. "But it is to your arms alone that the *Follower* of his most sacred Majesty now intrusts his safety."

"In aught that a soldier may do," answered Hereward; "make your own computation, and then reckon this single arm worth two against any man the Emperor has, not being of our own corps."

"Listen, my brave friend," continued Achilles. "This Nicanor was daring enough to throw a reproach on our noble corps, accusing them—gods and goddesses!—of plundering in the field, and yet more sacrilegious, of drinking the precious wine which was prepared for his most sacred Majesty's own blessed consumption. I, the sacred person of the Emperor being present, proceeded, as thou mayst well believe—"

"To give him the lie in his audacious throat!" burst in the Varangian—"named a place of meeting somewhere in the vicinity, and called the attendance of your poor follower, Hereward of Hampton, who is your bond slave for life long, for such an honor! I wish only you had told me to get my work-day arms; but, however, I have my battle-axe, and—" Here his companion seized a moment to break in, for

he was somewhat abashed at the lively tone of the young soldier.

"Hush thee, my son," said Achilles Tattius; "speak low, my excellent Hereward. Thou mistakest this thing. With thee by my side, I would not, indeed, hesitate to meet five such as Nicanor; but such is not the law of this most hallowed empire, nor the sentiments of the three times illustrious Prince who now rules it. Thou art debauched, my soldier, with the swaggering stories of the Franks, of whom we hear more and more every day."

"I would not willingly borrow any thing from those whom you call Franks and we Normans," answered the Varangian, in a disappointed, dogged tone.

"Why, listen, then," said the officer, as they proceeded on their walk, "listen to the reason of the thing, and consider whether such a custom can obtain, as that which they term the duello, in any country of civilisation and common sense, to say nothing of one which is blessed with the domination of the most rare Alexius Comnenus. Two great lords, or high officers, quarrel in the court, and before the reverend person of the Emperor. They dispute about a point of fact. Now, instead of each maintaining his own opinion by argument or evidence, suppose they had adopted the custom of these barbarous Franks, — 'Why, thou liest in thy throat,' says the one; and thou liest in thy very lungs,' says another; and they measure forth the lists of battle in the next meadow. Each swears to the truth of his quarrel, though probably neither well knows precisely how the fact stands. One, perhaps the harder, truer, and better man of the two, the Follower of the Emperor, and father of the Varangians (for death, my faithful follower, spares no man), lies dead on the ground, and the other comes back to predominate in the court, where, had the matter been inquired into by the rules of common sense and reason, the victor, as he is termed, would have been sent to the gal-lows. And yet this is the law of arms, as your fancy pleases to call it, friend Hereward!"

"May it please your Valor," answered the barbarian, "there is a show of sense in what you say; but you will sooner convince me that this blessed moonlight is the blackness of the wolf's mouth, than that I ought to hear myself called liar, without cramming the epithet down the speaker's throat with the spike of my battle-axe. The lie is to a man the same as a blow, and a blow degrades him into a slave and a beast of burden, if endured without retaliation."

"Ay, there it is!" said Achilles; "could I but get you to lay aside that inborn barbarism, which leads you, otherwise the most disciplined soldiers who serve the sacred Emperor, into such deadly quarrels and feuds—"

"Sir Captain," said the Varangian, in a sullen tone, "take my advice, and take the Varangians as you have them; for, believe my word, that if you could teach them to endure reproach-

es, bear the lie, or tolerate stripes, you would hardly find them, when their discipline is completed, worth the single day's salt which they cost to his holiness, if that be his title. I must tell you, moreover, valorous sir, that the Varangians will little thank their leader, who heard them called marauders, drunkards, and what not, and repelled not the charge on the spot."

"Now, if I knew not the humors of my barbarians," thought Tattius, in his own mind, "I should bring on myself a quarrel with these untamed islanders, who the Emperor thinks can be so easily kept in discipline. But I will settle this sport presently." Accordingly he addressed the Saxon in a soothing tone.

"My faithful soldier," he proceeded aloud, "we Romans, according to the custom of our ancestors, set as much glory on actually telling the truth, as you do in resenting the imputation of falsehood; and I could not with honor return a charge of falsehood upon Nicanor, since what he said is substantially true."

"What! that we Varangians were plunderers, drunkards, and the like?" said Hereward, more impatient than before.

"No, surely, not in that broad sense," said Achilles; "but there was too much foundation for the legend."

"When and where?" asked the Anglo-Saxon.

"You remember," replied his leader, "the long march near Laodicea, where the Varangians beat off a cloud of Turks, and retook a train of the imperial baggage? You know what was done that day—how you quenched your thirst, I mean?"

"I have some reason to remember it," said Hereward of Hampton; "for we were half choked with dust, fatigue, and, which was worst of all, constantly fighting with our faces to the rear, when we found some firkins of wine in certain carriages which were broken down—down our throats it went, as if it had been the best ale in Southampton."

"Ah, unhappy!" said the Follower; "saw ye not that the firkins were stamped with the thrice excellent Grand Butler's own inviolable seal, and set apart for the private use of his Imperial Majesty's most sacred lips?"

"By good Saint George of merry England, worth a dozen of your Saint George of Cappadocia, I neither thought nor cared about the matter," answered Hereward. "And I know your Valor drank a mighty draught yourself out of my head-piece; not this silver bauble, but my steel-cap, which is twice as ample. By the same token, that whereas before you were giving orders to fall back, you were a changed man when you had cleared your throat of the dust, and cried, 'Bide the other brunt, my brave and stout boys of Britain!'"

"Ay," said Achilles, "I know I am but too apt to be venturous in action. But you mistake, good Hereward; the wine I tasted in the extremity of martial fatigue, was not that set apart

for his sacred Majesty's own peculiar mouth, but a secondary sort, preserved for the Grand Butler himself, of which, as one of the great officers of the household, I might right lawfully partake—the chance was nevertheless sinfully unhappy."

"On my life," replied Hereward, "I cannot see the infelicity of drinking when we are dying of thirst."

"But cheer up, my noble comrade," said Achilles, after he had hurried over his own exculpation, and without noticing the Varangian's light estimation of the crime, "his Imperial Majesty, in his ineffable graciousness, imputes these ill-advised draughts as a crime to no one who par-look of them. He rebuked the Protospathaire for fishing up this accusation, and said, when he had recalled the bustle and confusion of that toilsome day, 'I thought myself well off amid that seven times heated furnace, when we obtained a draught of the barley-wine drunk by my poor Varangians; and I drank their health, as well I might, since, had it not been for their services, I had drunk my last; and well fare their hearts, though they quaffed my wine in return!' And with that he turned off, as one who said, 'I have too much of this, being a finding of matter and ripping up of stories against Achilles Tattius and his gallant Varangians.'"

"Now, may God bless his honest heart for it!" said Hereward, with more downright heartiness than formal respect. "I'll drink to his health in what I put next to my lips that quenches thirst, whether it may be ale, wine, or ditch-water."

"Why, well said, but speak not above thy breath! and remember to put thy hand to thy forehead, when naming, or even thinking of the Emperor!—Well, thou knowest, Hereward, that having thus obtained the advantage, I knew that the moment of a repulsed attack is always that of a successful charge; and so I brought against the Protospathaire, Nicanor, the robberies which have been committed at the Golden Gate, and other entrances of the city, where a merchant was but of late kidnapped and murdered, having on him certain jewels, the property of the Patriarch."

"Ay! indeed?" said the Varangian; "and what said Alex—I mean the most sacred Emperor, when he heard such things said of the city warders?—though he had himself given, as we say in our land, the fox the geese to keep."

"It may be he did," replied Achilles; "but he is a sovereign of deep policy, and was resolved not to proceed against these treacherous warders, or their general, the Protospathaire, without decisive proof. His sacred Majesty, therefore, charged me to obtain specific circumstantial proof by thy means."

"And that I would have managed in two minutes, had you not called me off the chase of your cut-throat vagabond. But his grace knows the word of a Varangian, and I can assure him that

either lucre of my silver guberdine, which they nickname a cuirass, or the hatred of my corps, would be sufficient to incite any of these knaves to cut the throat of a Varangian, who appeared to be asleep. So we go, I suppose, captain, to bear evidence before the Emperor to this night's work?"

"No, my active soldier, hadst thou taken the runaway villain, my first act must have been to set him free again; and my present charge to you is, to forget that such an adventure has ever taken place."

"Ha!" said the Varangian; "this is a change of policy indeed!"

"Why, yes, brave Hereward; ere I left the palace this night, the Patriarch made overtures of reconciliation betwixt me and the Protospathaire, which, as our agreement is of much consequence to the state, I could not very well reject, either as a good soldier or a good Christian. All offences to my honor are to be in the fullest degree repaid, for which the Patriarch interposes his warrant. The Emperor who will rather wink hard than see disagreements, loves better the matter should be slurred over thus."

"And the reproaches upon the Varangians," said Hereward—

"Shall be fully retracted and atoned for," answered Achilles; "and a weighty donative in gold dealt among the corps of the Anglo-Danish axemen. Thou, my Hereward, mayst be distributor; and thus, if well managed, mayst plate thy battle-axe with gold."

"I love my axe better as it is," said the Varangian. "My father bore it against the robber Normans at Hastings. Steel instead of gold for my money."

"Thou mayst make thy choice, Hereward," answered his officer; "only, if thou art poor, say the fault was thine own."

But here, in the course of their circuit round Constantinople, the officer and his soldier came to a very small wicket or sallyport, opening on the interior of a large and massive advanced work, which terminated an entrance to the city itself. Here the officer halted, and made his obedi-ence, as a devotee who is about to enter a chapel of peculiar sanctity.

CHAPTER III.

Here, youth, thy foot unbrace,
Here, youth, thy brow unbraide;
Each tribute that may grace
The threshold here be paid.
Walk with the stealthy pace
Which Nature teaches deer,
When, echoing in the chase,
The hunter's horn they hear.

THE COURT.

BEFORE entering, Achilles Tattius made various gesticulations which were imitated roughly and awkwardly by the unpractised Varangian, whose service with his corps had been almost entirely in the fields, his routine of duty not