

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

having, till very lately, called him to serve as one of the garrison of Constantinople. He was not, therefore, acquainted with the minute observations which the Greeks, who were the most formal and ceremonious soldiers and courtiers in the world, rendered not merely to the Greek Emperor in person, but throughout the sphere which peculiarly partook of his influence.

Achilles, having gesticulated after his own fashion, at length touched the door with a rap, distinct at once and modest. This was thrice repeated, when the captain whispered to his attendant, "The interior!—for thy life, do as thou seest me do." At the same moment he started back, and, stooping his head on his breast, with his hands over his eyes, as if to save them from being dazzled by an expected burst of light, awaited the answer to his summons. The Anglo-Dane, desirous to obey his leader, imitating him as near as he could, stood side by side in the posture of Oriental humiliation. The little portal opened inwards, when no burst of light was seen, but four of the Varangians were made visible in the entrance, holding each his battle-axe, as if about to strike down the intruders who had disturbed the silence of their watch.

"Acolouthos," said the leader, by way of password.

"Tatius and Acolouthos," murmured the warders as a countersign.

Each sentinel sunk his weapon.

Achilles then reared his stately crest, with a conscious dignity at making this display of court influence in the eyes of his soldiers. Hereward observed an undisturbed gravity, to the surprise of his officer, who marvelled in his own mind how he could be such a barbarian as to regard with apathy a scene, which had in his eyes the most impressive and peculiar awe. This indifference he imputed to the stupid insensibility of his companion.

They passed on between the sentinels, who wheeled backward in file, on each side of the portal, and gave the strangers entrance to a long narrow plank, stretched across the city-moat, which was here drawn within the enclosure of an external rampart, projecting beyond the principal wall of the city.

"This," he whispered to Hereward, "is called the Bridge of Peril, and it is said that it has been occasionally smeared with oil, or strewed with dried peas, and that the bodies of men, known to have been in company with the Emperor's most sacred person, have been taken out of the Golden Horn,* into which the moat empties itself."

"I would not have thought," said the islander, raising his voice to its usual rough tone, "that Alexius Comnenus—"

"Hush, rash and regardless of your life!" said Achilles Tatius; "to awaken the daughter of the imperial arch,† is to incur deep penalty at

* The harbor of Constantinople.

† The daughter of the arch was a courtly expression for the echo, as we find explained by the courtly commander himself.

all times; but when a rash delinquent has disturbed her with reflections on his most sacred Highness the Emperor, death is a punishment far too light for the effrontery which has interrupted her blessed slumber!—I'll hath been my fate, to have positive commands laid on me, enjoining me to bring into the sacred precincts a creature who hath no more of the salt of civilisation in him than to keep his mortal frame from corruption, since of all mental culture he is totally incapable. Consider thyself, Hereward, and be think thee what thou art. By nature a poor barbarian—thy best boast that thou hast slain certain Mussulmans in thy sacred master's quarrel; and here art thou admitted into the inviolable enclosure of the Blaquernal, and in the hearing not only of the royal daughter of the imperial arch, which means," said the eloquent leader, "the echo of the sublime vaults; but—Heaven be our guide,—for what I know, within the natural hearing of the Sacred Ear itself!"

"Well, my captain," replied the Varangian, "I cannot presume to speak my mind after the fashion of this place; but I can easily suppose I am but ill qualified to converse in the presence of the court, nor do I mean therefore to say a word till I am spoken to, unless when I shall see no better company than ourselves. To be plain, I find difficulty in modelling my voice to a smoother tone than nature has given it. So, henceforth, my brave captain, I will be mute, unless when you give me a sign to speak."

"You will act wisely," said the captain. "Here be certain persons of high rank, nay, some that have been born in the purple itself, that will, Hereward (alas for thee!) prepare to sound with the line of their courtly understanding the depths of thy barbarous and shallow conceit. Do not, therefore, then, join their graceful smiles with thy inhuman bursts of cackination, with which thou art wont to thunder forth when opening in chorus with thy messmates."

"I tell thee I will be silent," said the Varangian, moved somewhat beyond his mood. "If you trust my word, so; if you think I am a jackdaw that must be speaking, whether in or out of place and purpose, I am contented to go back again, and therein we can end the matter."

Achilles, conscious perhaps that it was his best policy not to drive his subaltern to extremity, lowered his tone somewhat in reply to the uncourtly note of the soldier, as if allowing something for the rude manners of one whom he considered as not easily matched among the Varangians themselves, for strength and valor; qualities which, in despite of Hereward's discourtesy, Achilles suspected in his heart were fully more valuable than all those nameless graces which a more courtly and accomplished soldier might possess.

The expert navigator of the intricacies of the imperial residence, carried the Varangian through two or three small complicated courts, forming a

part of the extensive Palace of the Blaquernal,* and entered the building itself by a side-door—watched in like manner by a sentinel of the Varangian Guard, whom they passed on being recognised. In the next apartment was stationed the Court of Guard, where were certain soldiers of the same corps amusing themselves at games somewhat resembling the modern draughts and dice, while they seasoned their pastime with frequent applications to deep flagons of ale, which were furnished to them while passing away their hours of duty. Some glances passed between Hereward and his comrades, and he would have joined them, or at least spoken to them; for, since the adventure of the Mitylenian, Hereward had rather thought himself annoyed than distinguished by his moonlight ramble in the company of his commander, excepting always the short and interesting period during which he conceived they were on the way to fight a duel. Still, however negligent in the strict observance of the ceremonies of the sacred palace, the Varangians had, in their own way, rigid notions of calculating their military duty; in consequence of which Hereward, without speaking to his companions, followed his leader through the guard-room, and one or two antechambers adjacent, the splendid and luxurious furniture of which convinced him that he could be nowhere else save in the sacred residence of his master the Emperor.

At length, having traversed passages and apartments with which the captain seemed familiar, and which he threaded with a stealthy, silent, and apparently reverential pace, as if, in his own inflated phrase, afraid to awaken the sounding echoes of those lofty and monumental halls, another species of inhabitants began to be visible. In different entrances, and in different apartments, the northern soldier beheld those unfortunate slaves, chiefly of African descent, raised occasionally under the Emperors of Greece to great power and honors, who, in that respect, imitated one of the most barbarous points of Oriental despotism. These slaves were differently occupied; some standing, as if on guard, at gates or in passages, with their drawn sabres in their hands; some were sitting in the Oriental fashion, on carpets, reposing themselves, or playing at various games, all of a character profoundly silent. Not a word passed between the guide of Hereward, and the withered and deformed beings whom they thus encountered. The exchange of a glance with the principal soldier seemed all that was necessary to ensure both an uninterrupted passage.

After making their way through several apartments, empty or thus occupied, they at length entered one of black marble, or some other dark-colored stone, much loftier and longer than the rest. Side passages opened into it, so far as

* This palace derived its name from the neighboring Black-scan Gate and Bridge.

the islander could discern, descending from several portals in the wall; but as the oils and gums with which the lamps in these passages were fed diffused a dim vapor around, it was difficult to ascertain, from the imperfect light, either the shape of the hall, or the style of its architecture. At the upper and lower ends of the chamber, there was a stronger and clearer light. It was when they were in the middle of this huge and long apartment, that Achilles said to the soldier, in the sort of cautionary whisper which he appeared to have substituted in place of his natural voice since he had crossed the Bridge of Peril—

"Remain here till I return, and stir from this hall on no account."

"To hear is to obey," answered the Varangian, an expression of obedience, which, like many other phrases and fashions, the empire, which still affected the name of Roman, had borrowed from the barbarians of the East. Achilles Tatius then hastened up the steps which led to one of the side-doors of the hall, which being slightly pressed, its noiseless hinge gave way and admitted him.

Left alone to amuse himself as he best could, within the limits permitted to him, the Varangian visited in succession both ends of the hall, where the objects were more visible than elsewhere. The lower end had in its centre a small low-browed door of iron. Over it was displayed the Greek crucifix in bronze, and around and on every side, the representation of shackles, fetterbolts, and the like, were also executed in bronze, and disposed as appropriate ornaments over the entrance. The door of the dark archway was half open, and Hereward naturally looked in, the orders of his chief not prohibiting his satisfying his curiosity thus far. A dense red light, more like a distant spark than a lamp, affixed to the wall of what seemed a very narrow and winding stair, resembling in shape and size a draw-well, the verge of which opened on the threshold of the iron door, showed a descent which seemed to conduct to the infernal regions. The Varangian, however obtuse he might be considered by the quick-witted Greeks, had no difficulty in comprehending that a staircase, having such a gloomy appearance, and the access to which was by a portal decorated in such a melancholy style of architecture, could only lead to the dungeons of the imperial palace, the size and complicated number of which were neither the least remarkable, nor the least awe-imposing portion of the sacred edifice. Listening profoundly, he even thought he caught such accents as befitted those graves of living men, the faint echoing of groans and sighs, sounding as it were from the deep abyss beneath. But in this respect his fancy probably filled up the sketch which his conjectures bodied out.

"I have done nothing," he thought, "to merit being immured in one of these subterranean dens. Surely, though my captain, Achilles Tati-

us, is, under favor, little better than an ass, he cannot be so false of word as to train me to prison under false pretexes? I trow he shall first see for the last time how the English axe plays, if such is to be the sport of the evening. But let us see the upper end of this enormous vault; it may bear a better omen."

Thus thinking, and not quite ruling the tramp of his armed footstep, according to the ceremonies of the place, the large-limbed Saxon strode to the upper end of the black marble hall. The ornament of the portal here was a small altar, like those in the temples of the heathen deities, which projected above the centre of the arch. On this altar smoked incense of some sort, the fumes of which rose curling in a thin cloud to the roof, and thence extending through the hall, enveloped in its column of smoke a singular emblem, of which the Varangian could make nothing. It was the representation of two human arms and hands, seeming to issue from the wall, having the palms extended and open, as about to confer some boon on those who approached the altar. These arms were formed of bronze, and being placed farther back than the altar with its incense, were seen through the curling smoke by lamps so disposed as to illuminate the whole archway. "The meaning of this," thought the simple barbarian, "I should well know how to explain, were these fists clenched, and were the hall dedicated to the *pancratium*, which we call boxing; but as even these helpless Greeks use not their hands without their fingers being closed, by St George I can make out nothing of their meaning."

At this instant Achilles entered the black marble hall at the same door by which he had left it, and came up to his neophyte, as the Varangian might be termed.

"Come with me now, Hereward, for here approaches the thick of the onset. Now, display the utmost courage that thou canst summon up, for believe me, thy credit and name also depend on it."

"Fear nothing for either," said Hereward, "if he heart or hand of one man can bear him through the adventure by the help of a toy like this."

"Keep thy voice low and submissive, I have told thee a score of times," said the leader, "and lower thine axe, which, as I bethink me, thou hadst better leave in the outer apartment."

"With your leave, noble captain," replied Hereward, "I am unwilling to lay aside my bread-winner. I am one of those awkward clowns who cannot behave seemly unless I have something to occupy my hands, and my faithful battle-axe comes most natural to me."

"Keep it then; but remember thou dash it not about according to thy custom, nor bellow, nor shout, nor cry out as in a battle-field; think of the sacred character of the place, which exaggerates riot into blasphemy, and remember the

persons whom thou mayst chance to see, an offence to some of whom, it may be, ranks in the same sense with blasphemy against Heaven itself."

This lecture carried the tutor and the pupil so far as to the side-door, and thence inducted them into a species of anteroom, from which Achilles led his Varangian forward, until a pair of folding-doors, opening into what proved to be a principal apartment of the palace, exhibited to the rough-hewn native of the north a sight equally new and surprising.

It was an apartment of the palace of the Blagnernal, dedicated to the special service of the beloved daughter of the Emperor Alexius, the Princess Anna Comnena, known to our times by her literary talents, which record the history of her father's reign. She was seated, the queen and sovereign of a literary circle, such as an imperial Princess, porphyrogenita, or born in the sacred purple chamber itself, could assemble in those days, and a glance round will enable us to form an idea of her guests or companions.

The literary Princess herself had the bright eyes, straight features, and comely and pleasing manners, which all would have allowed to the Emperor's daughter, even if she could not have been, with severe truth, said to have possessed them. She was placed upon a small bench, or sofa, the fair sex here not being permitted to recline, as was the fashion of the Roman ladies. A table before her was loaded with books, plants, herbs, and drawings. She sat on a slight elevation, and those who enjoyed the intimacy of the Princess, or to whom she wished to speak in particular, were allowed, during such sublime colloquy, to rest their knees on the little dais, or elevated place where her chair found its station, in a posture half standing, half kneeling. Three other seats, of different heights, were placed on the dais, and under the same canopy of state which overshadowed that of the Princess Anna.

The first, which strictly resembled her own chair in size and convenience, was one designed for her husband, Nicephorus Briennius. He was said to entertain or affect the greatest respect for his wife's erudition, though the courtiers were of opinion he would have liked to absent himself from her evening parties more frequently than was particularly agreeable to the Princess Anna and her imperial parents. This was partly explained by the private tattle of the court, which averred, that the Princess Anna Comnena had been more beautiful when she was less learned; and that, though still a fine woman, she had somewhat lost the charms of her person as she became enriched in her mind.

To atone for the lowly fashion of the seat of Nicephorus Briennius, it was placed as near to his Princess as it could possibly be edged by the ushers, so that she might not lose one look of her handsome spouse, nor he the least particle of wis-

dom which might drop from the lips of his erudite consort.

Two other seats of honor, or rather thrones,—for they had footstools placed for the support of the feet, rests for the arms, and embroidered pillows for the comfort of the back, not to mention the glories of the outspreading canopy,—were destined for the imperial couple, who frequently attended their daughter's studies, which she prosecuted in public in the way we have intimated. On such occasions, the Empress Irene enjoyed the triumph peculiar to the mother of an accomplished daughter, while Alexius, as it might happen, sometimes listened with complacency to the rehearsal of his own exploits in the inflated language of the Princess, and sometimes mildly nodded over her dialogues upon the mysteries of philosophy, with the Patriarch Zosimus, and other sages.

All these four distinguished seats for the persons of the Imperial family, were occupied at the moment which we have described, excepting that which ought to have been filled by Nicephorus Briennius, the husband of the fair Anna Comnena. To his negligence and absence was perhaps owing the angry spot on the brow of his fair bride. Beside her on the platform were two white-robed nymphs of her household; female slaves, in a word, who reposed themselves on their knees on cushions, when their assistance was not wanted as a species of living book-desks, to support and extend the parchment rolls, in which the Princess recorded her own wisdom, or from which she quoted that of others. One of these young maidens, called Astarte, was so distinguished as a calligrapher, or beautiful writer of various alphabets and languages, that she narrowly escaped being sent as a present to the Caliph (who could neither read nor write), at a time when it was necessary to bribe him into peace. Violante, usually called the Muse, the other attendant of the Princess, a mistress of the vocal and instrumental art of music, was actually sent in a compliment to soothe the temper of Robert Guiscard, the Archduke of Apulia, who, being aged and stone-deaf, and the girl under ten years old at the time, returned the valued present to the imperial donor, and, with the selfishness which was one of that wily Norman's characteristics, desired to have some one sent him who could contribute to his pleasure, instead of a twangling squalling infant.

Beneath these elevated seats there sat, or reposed on the floor of the hall, such favorites as were admitted. The Patriarch Zosimus, and one or two old men, were permitted the use of certain lowly stools, which were the only seats prepared for the learned members of the Princess's evening parties, as they would have been called in our days. As for the younger magnates, the honor of being permitted to join the imperial conversation was expected to render them far superior to the paltry accommodation of a joint-stool. Five or six courtiers, of different dress and ages,

might compose the party, who either stood, or relieved their posture by kneeling, along the verge of an adorned fountain, which shed a mist of such very small rain as to dispel almost insensibly, cooling the fragrant breeze which breathed from the flowers and shrubs, that were so disposed as to send a waste of sweets around. One goodly old man, named Michael Agelastes, big, burly, and dressed like an ancient Cynic philosopher, was distinguished by assuming, in a great measure, the ragged garb and mad bearing of that sect, and by his inflexible practice of the strictest ceremonies exigible by the Imperial family. He was known by an affectation of cynical principle and language, and of republican philosophy, strangely contradicted by his practical deference to the great. It was wonderful how long this man, now sixty years old and upwards, disdained to avail himself of the accustomed privilege of leaning, or supporting his limbs, and with what regularity he maintained either the standing posture or that of absolute kneeling; but the first was so much his usual attitude, that he acquired among his court friends the name of Elephas, or the Elephant, because the ancients had an idea that the half-reasoning animal, as it is called, has joints incapable of kneeling down.

"Yet I have seen them kneel when I was in the country of the Gymnosophists," said a person present on the evening of Hereward's introduction.

"To take up their master on their shoulders? so will ours," said the Patriarch Zosimus, with the slight sneer which was the nearest advance to a sarcasm that the etiquette of the Greek court permitted; for on all ordinary occasions, it would not have offended the presence more surely, literally to have drawn a poniard, than to exchange a repartee in the imperial circle. Even the sarcasm, such as it was, would have been thought censurable by that ceremonious court in any but the Patriarch, to whose high rank some license was allowed.

Just as he had thus far offended decorum, Achilles Tattius, and his soldier Hereward, entered the apartment. The former bore him with even more than his usual degree of courtliness, as if to set his own good-breeding off by a comparison with the inept bearing of his follower; while, nevertheless, he had a secret pride in exhibiting, as one under his own immediate and distinct command, a man whom he was accustomed to consider as one of the finest soldiers in the army of Alexius, whether appearance or reality were to be considered.

Some astonishment followed the abrupt entrance of the new comers. Achilles indeed glided into the presence with the easy and quiet extremity of respect which intimated his habitude in these regions. But Hereward started on his entrance, and perceiving himself in company of the court, hastily strove to remedy his disorder. His commander, throwing round a scarce visible

shrug of apology, made then a confidential and monitory sign to Hereward to mind his conduct. What he meant was, that he should doff his helmet and fall prostrate on the ground. But the Anglo-Saxon, unaccustomed to interpret obscure inferences, naturally thought of his military duties, and advanced in front of the Emperor, as when he rendered his military homage. He made reverence with his knee, half touched his cap, and then recovering and shouldering his axe, stood in advance of the imperial chair, as if on duty as a sentinel.

A gentle smile of surprise went round the circle as they gazed on the manly appearance, and somewhat unceremonious but martial deportment of the northern soldier. The various spectators around consulted the Emperor's face, not knowing whether they were to take the intrusive manner of the Varangian's entrance as matter of ill-breeding, and manifest their horror, or whether they ought rather to consider the bearing of the life-guardsmen as indicating blunt and manly zeal, and therefore to be received with applause.

It was some little time ere the Emperor recovered himself sufficiently to strike a key-note, as was usual upon such occasions. Alexius Comnenus had been wrapped for a moment into some species of slumber, or at least absence of mind. Out of this he had been startled by the sudden appearance of the Varangian; for though he was accustomed to commit the outer guards of the palace to this trusty corps, yet the deformed blacks whom we have mentioned, and who sometimes rose to be ministers of state and commanders of armies, were, on all ordinary occasions, intrusted with the guard of the interior of the palace. Alexius, therefore, awakened from his slumber, and the military phrase of his daughter still ringing in his ears as she was reading a description of the great historical work, in which she had detailed the conflicts of his reign, felt somewhat unprepared for the entrance and military deportment of one of the Saxon guard, with whom he was accustomed to associate, in general, scenes of blows, danger, and death.

After a troubled glance around, his look rested on Achilles Tatius. "Why here," he said, "trusty Follower? why this soldier here at this time of night?" Here, of course, was the moment for modelling the visages *regis ad exemplum*; but, ere the Patriarch could frame his countenance into devout apprehension of danger, Achilles Tatius had spoken a word or two, which reminded Alexius's memory that the soldier had been brought there by his own special orders. "Oh, ay! true, good fellow," said he, smoothing his troubled brow; "we had forgot that passage among the cares of state." He then spoke to the Varangian with a countenance more frank, and a heartier accent than he used to his courtiers; for, to a despotic monarch, a faithful life-guardsmen is a person of confidence, while an

officer of high rank is always in some degree a subject of distrust. "Ha!" said he, "our worthy Anglo-Dane, how fares he?"—This unceremonious salutation surprised all but him to whom it was addressed. Hereward answered, accompanying his words with a military obeisance which partook of heartiness rather than reverence, with a loud unsubdued voice, which startled the presence still more that the language was Saxon, which these foreigners occasionally used, "*Waes hael Kaisar mirrig und machtigh!*"—that is, Be of good health, stout and mighty Emperor. The Emperor, with a smile of intelligence, to show he could speak to his guards in their own foreign language, replied, by the well known counter-signal—"*Drink hael!*"

Immediately a page brought a silver goblet of wine. The Emperor put his lips to it, though he scarce tasted the liquor, then commanded it to be handed to Hereward, and bade the soldier drink. The Saxon did not wait till he was desired a second time, but took off the contents without hesitation. A gentle smile, decorous as the presence required, passed over the assembly, at a feat which, though by no means wonderful in a hyperborean, seemed prodigious in the estimation of the moderate Greeks. Alexius himself laughed more loudly than his courtiers thought might be becoming on their part, and mustering what few words of Varangian he possessed, which he eked out with Greek, demanded of his life-guardsmen—"Well, my noble Briton, or Edward, as men call thee, dost thou know the flavor of that wine?"

"Yes," answered the Varangian, without change of countenance, "I tasted it once before at Laodicea—"

Here his officer, Achilles Tatius, became sensible that his soldier approached delicate ground, and in vain endeavored to gain his attention, in order that he might furtively convey to him a hint to be silent, or at least take heed what he said in such a presence. But the soldier, who, with proper military observance, continued to have his eye and attention fixed on the Emperor, as the prince whom he was bound to answer or to serve, saw none of the hints, which Achilles at length suffered to become so broad, that Zosimus and the Protospathaire exchanged expressive glances, as calling on each other to notice the by-play of the leader of the Varangians.

In the meanwhile, the dialogue between the Emperor and his soldier continued:—"How," said Alexius, "did this draught relish compared with the former?"

"There is fairer company here, my Hege, than that of the Arabian archers," answered Hereward, with a look and bow of instinctive good-breeding; "nevertheless, there lacks the flavor which the heat of the sun, the dust of the combat, with the fatigue of wielding such a weapon as this" (advancing his axe) "for eight hours together, give to a cup of rare wine."

"Another deficiency there might be," said Agelastes the Elephant, "provided I am pardoned hinting at it," he added, with a look to the throne,—"it might be the smaller size of the cup compared with that at Laodicea."

"By Taranis, you say true," answered the life-guardsmen; "at Laodicea I used my helmet."

"Let us see the cups compared together, good friend," said Agelastes, continuing his rillery, "that we may be sure thou hast not swallowed the present goblet; for I thought, from the manner of the draught, there was a chance of its going down with its contents."

"There are some things which I do not easily swallow," answered the Varangian, in a calm and indifferent tone; "but they must come from a younger and more active man than you."

The company again smiled to each other, as if to hint that the philosopher, though also parcel wit by profession, had the worst of the encounter.

The Emperor at the same time interfered.—"Nor did I send for thee hither, good fellow, to be baited by idle taunts."

Here Agelastes shrunk back in the circle, as a bound that has been rebuked by the huntsman for babbling—and the Princess Anna Comnena, who had indicated by her fair features a certain degree of impatience, at length spoke—"Will it then please you, my imperial and much-beloved father, to inform those blessed with admission to the Muses' temple, for what it is that you have ordered this soldier to be this night admitted to a place so far above his rank in life? Permit me to say, we ought not to waste, in frivolous and silly jests, the time which is sacred to the welfare of the empire, as every moment of your leisure must be."

"Our daughter speaks wisely," said the Empress Irene, who, like most mothers who do not possess much talent themselves, and are not very capable of estimating it in others, was, nevertheless, a great admirer of her favorite daughter's accomplishments, and ready to draw them out on all occasions. "Permit me to remark, that in this divine and selected palace of the Muses, dedicated to the studies of our well-beloved and highly-gifted daughter, whose pen will preserve your reputation, our most imperial husband, till the desolation of the universe, and which enlivens and delights this society, the very flower of the wits of our sublime court;—permit me to say, that we have, merely by admitting a single life-guardsmen, given our conversation the character of that which distinguishes a barrack."

Now the Emperor Alexius Comnenus had the same feeling with many an honest man in ordinary life when his wife begins a long oration, especially as the Empress Irene did not always retain the observance consistent with his awful rule and right supremacy, although especially severe in exacting it from all others, in reference to her lord. Therefore, though he had felt some

pleasure in gaining a short release from the monotonous recitation of the Princess's history, he now saw the necessity of resuming it, or of listening to the matrimonial eloquence of the Empress. He sighed, therefore, as he said, "I crave your pardon, good our imperial spouse, and our daughter born in the purple chamber. I remember me, our most amiable and accomplished daughter, that last night you wished to know the particulars of the battle of Laodicea, with the heathenish Arabs, whom Heaven confound. And for certain considerations which moved ourselves to add other inquiries to our own recollection, Achilles Tatius, our most trusty Follower, was commissioned to introduce into this place one of those soldiers under his command, being such a one whose courage and presence of mind could best enable him to remark what passed around him on that remarkable and bloody day. And this I suppose to be the man brought to us for that purpose."

"If I am permitted to speak, and live," answered the Follower, "your Imperial Highness, with those divine Princesses, whose name is to us as those of blessed saints, have in your presence the flower of my Anglo-Danes, or whatsoever unbaptized name is given to my soldiers. He is, as I may say, a barbarian of barbarians; for, although in birth and breeding unfit to soil with his feet the carpet of this precinct of accomplishment and eloquence, he is so brave—so trusty—so devotedly attached—and so unhesitatingly zealous, that—"

"Enough, good Follower," said the Emperor; "let us only know that he is cool and observant, not confused and fluttered during close battle, as we have sometimes observed in you and other great commanders—and, to speak truth, have even felt in our imperial self on extraordinary occasions. Which difference in man's constitution is not owing to any inferiority of courage, but, in us, to a certain consciousness of the importance of our own safety to the welfare of the whole, and to a feeling of the number of duties which at once devolve on us. Speak then, and speak quickly, Tatius; for I discern that our dearest consort, and our thrice fortunate daughter born in the imperial chamber of purple, seem to wax somewhat impatient."

"Hereward," answered Tatius, "is as composed and observant in battle, as another in a festive dance. The dust of war is the breath of his nostrils; and he will prove his worth in combat against any four others (Varangians excepted), who shall term themselves your Imperial Highness's bravest servants."

"Follower," said the Emperor, with a displeased look and tone, "instead of instructing these poor, ignorant barbarians, in the rules and civilisation of our enlightened empire, you foster, by such boastful words, the idle pride and fury of their temper, which hurries them into brawls with the legions of other foreign countries, and even breeds quarrels among themselves."

"If my mouth may be opened in the way of most humble excuse," said the Follower, "I would presume to reply, that I but an hour hence talked with this poor ignorant Anglo-Dane, on the paternal care with which the Imperial Majesty of Greece regards the preservation of that concord which unites the followers of his standard, and how desirous he is to promote that harmony, more especially amongst the various nations who have the happiness to serve you, in spite of the bloodthirsty quarrels of the Franks, and other northern men, who are never free from civil broil. I think the poor youth's understanding can bear witness to this much in my behalf." He then looked towards Hereward, who gravely inclined his head in token of assent to what his captain said. His excuse thus ratified, Achilles proceeded in his apology more firmly. "What I have said even now was spoken without consideration; for, instead of pretending that this Hereward would face four of your Imperial Highness's servants, I ought to have said, that he was willing to defy six of your Imperial Majesty's most deadly enemies, and permit them to choose every circumstance of time, arms, and place of combat."

"That hath a better sound," said the Emperor, "and in truth, for the information of my dearest daughter, who piously has undertaken to record the things which I have been the blessed means of doing for the Empire, I earnestly wish that she should remember, that though the sword of Alexius hath not slept in its sheath, yet he hath never sought his own aggrandizement of fame at the price of bloodshed among his subjects."

"I trust," said Anna Comnena, "that in my humble sketch of the life of the princely sire from whom I derive my existence, I have not forgot to notice his love of peace, and care for the lives of his soldiery, and abhorrence of the bloody manners of the heretic Franks, as one of his most distinguishing characteristics."

Assuming then an attitude more commanding, as one who was about to claim the attention of the company, the Princess inclined her head gently around to the audience, and taking a roll of parchment from the fair amanuensis, which she had, in a most beautiful handwriting, engrossed to her mistress's dictation, Anna Comnena prepared to read its contents.

At this moment, the eyes of the Princess rested for an instant on the barbarian Hereward, to whom she deigned this greeting—"Valiant barbarian, of whom my fancy recalls some memory, as if in a dream, thou art now to hear a work, which, if the author be put into comparison with the subject, might be likened to a portrait of Alexander, in executing which, some inferior dauber has usurped the pencil of Apelles; but which essay, however it may appear unworthy of the subject in the eyes of many, must yet command some envy in those who candidly consider its contents, and the difficulty of portraying the great personage concerning whom it is written.

Still, I pray thee, give thine attention to what I have now to read, since this account of the battle of Laodicea, the details thereof being principally derived from his Imperial Highness, my excellent father, from the altogether valiant Protospathaire, his invincible general, together with Achilles Tatius, the faithful Follower of our victorious Emperor, may nevertheless be in some circumstances inaccurate. For it is to be thought, that the high offices of those great commanders retained them at a distance from some particularly active parts of the fray, in order that they might have more cool and accurate opportunity to form a judgment upon the whole, and transmit their orders, without being disturbed by any thoughts of personal safety. Even so, brave barbarian, in the art of embroidery (marvel not that we are a proficient in that mechanical process, since it is patronized by Minerva, whose studies we affect to follow), we reserve to ourselves the superintendence of the entire web, and commit to our maidens and others the execution of particular parts. Thus, in the same manner, thou, valiant Varangian, being engaged in the very thickest of the affray before Laodicea, mayst point out to us the unworthy historian of so renowned a war, those chances which befell where men fought hand to hand, and where the fate of war was decided by the edge of the sword. Therefore, dread not, thou bravest of the axe-men to whom we owe that victory, and so many others, to correct any mistake or misapprehension which we may have been led into concerning the details of that glorious event."

"Madam," said the Varangian, "I shall attend with diligence to what your Highness may be pleased to read to me; although, as to presuming to blame the history of a Princess born in the purple, far be such a presumption from me; still less would it become a barbaric Varangian to pass a judgment on the military conduct of the Emperor, by whom he is liberally paid, or of the commander, by whom he is well treated. Before an action, if our advice is required, it is ever faithfully tendered; but according to my rough wit, our censure after the field is fought would be more invidious than useful. Touching the Protospathaire, if it be the duty of a general to absent himself from close action, I can safely say, or swear, were it necessary, that the invincible commander was never seen by me within a javelin's cast of aught that looked like danger."

This speech, boldly and bluntly delivered, had a general effect on the company present. The Emperor himself, and Achilles Tatius, looked like men who had got off from a danger better than they expected. The Protospathaire labored to conceal a movement of resentment. Agelastes whispered to the Patriarch, near whom he was placed, "The northern battle-axe lacks neither point nor edge."

"Hush!" said Zosimus, "let us hear how this is to end; the Princess is about to speak."

CHAPTER IV.

We heard the Techr, so these Arabs call
Their shout of onset, when with loud acclaim
They challenged Heaven, as if demanding conquest.
The battle join'd, and through the barb'rous herd,
Fight, fight! and Paradise! was all their cry.

THE SIEGE OF DAMASCUS.

THE voice of the northern soldier, although modified by feelings of respect to the Emperor, and even attachment to his captain, had more of a tone of blunt sincerity, nevertheless, than was usually heard by the sacred echoes of the imperial palace; and though the Princess Anna Comnena began to think that she had invoked the opinion of a severe judge, she was sensible, at the same time, by the deference of his manner, that his respect was of a character more real, and his applause, should she gain it, would prove more truly flattering, than the gilded assent of the whole court of her father. She gazed with some surprise and attention on Hereward, already described as a very handsome young man, and felt the natural desire to please, which is easily created in the mind towards a fine person of the other sex. His attitude was easy and bold, but neither clownish nor uncourtly. His title of a barbarian, placed him at once free from the forms of civilized life, and the rules of artificial politeness. But his character for valor, and the noble self-confidence of his bearing, gave him a deeper interest than would have been acquired by a more studied and anxious address, or an excess of reverential awe.

In short, the Princess Anna Comnena, high in rank as she was, and born in the imperial purple, which she herself deemed the first of all attributes, felt herself, nevertheless, in preparing to resume the recitation of her history, more anxious to obtain the approbation of this rude soldier, than that of all the rest of the courteous audience. She knew them well, it is true, and felt nowise solicitous about the applause which the daughter of the emperor was sure to receive with full hands from those of the Grecian court to whom she might choose to communicate the productions of her father's daughter. But she had now a judge of a new character, whose applause, if bestowed, must have something in it intrinsically real, since it could only be obtained by affecting his head or his heart.

It was perhaps under the influence of these feelings, that the Princess was somewhat longer than usual in finding out the passage in the roll of history at which she purposed to commence. It was also noticed that she began her recitation with a diffidence and embarrassment surprising to the noble hearers, who had often seen her in full possession of her presence of mind before what they conceived a more distinguished, and even more critical audience.

Neither were the circumstances of the Varangian such as rendered the scene indifferent to him. Anna Comnena had indeed attained her

fifth lustre, and that is a period after which Grecian beauty is understood to commence its decline. How long she had passed that critical period, was a secret to all but the trusted ward-women of the purple chamber. Enough, that it was affirmed by the popular tongue, and seemed to be attested by that bent towards philosophy and literature, which is not supposed to be congenial to beauty in its earlier buds, to amount to one or two years more. She might be seven-and-twenty.

Still Anna Comnena was, or had very lately been, a beauty of the very first rank, and must be supposed to have still retained charms to captivate a barbarian of the north; if, indeed, he himself was not careful to maintain a heedful recollection of the immeasurable distance between them. Indeed, even this recollection might hardly have saved Hereward from the charms of this enchantress, bold, free-born, and fearless as he was; for, during that time of strange revolutions, there were many instances of successful generals sharing the couch of imperial princesses, whom perhaps they had themselves rendered widows, in order to make way for their own pretensions. But, besides the influence or other recollections which the reader may learn hereafter, Hereward, though flattered by the unusual degree of attention which the Princess bestowed upon him, saw in her only the daughter of his Emperor and adopted liege lord, and the wife of a noble prince, whom reason and duty alike forbade him to think of in any other light.

It was after one or two preliminary efforts that the Princess Anna began her reading with an uncertain voice, which gained strength and fortitude as she proceeded with the following passage from a well-known part of her history of Alexius Comnenus, but which unfortunately has not been republished in the Byzantine historians. The narrative cannot, therefore, be otherwise than acceptable to the antiquarian reader; and the author hopes to receive the thanks of the learned world for the recovery of a curious fragment, which, without his exertions, must probably have passed to the gulf of total oblivion.

The Retreat of Laodicea,

NOW FIRST PUBLISHED FROM THE GREEK OF THE PRINCESS COMNENA'S HISTORY OF HER FATHER.

"The sun had betaken himself to his bed in the ocean, ashamed, it would seem, to see the immortal army of our most sacred Emperor Alexius surrounded by those barbarous hordes of unbelieving barbarians, who, as described in our last chapter, had occupied the various passes both in front and rear of the Romans,* secured during the preceding night by the wily barbarians. Although, therefore, a triumphant course

* More properly termed the Greeks; but we follow the phraseology of the fair authoress.