

## CHAPTER XI.

Without, a ruin, broken, tangled, cumbrous,  
Within, it was a little paradise,  
Where Taste had made her dwelling. Statuary,  
First-born of human art, moulded her images,  
And bade men mark and worship.

ANONYMOUS.

THE Count of Paris and his lady attended the old man, whose advanced age, his excellence in the use of the French language, which he spoke to admiration,—above all, his skill in applying it to poetical and romantic subjects, which was essential to what was then termed history and belles lettres,—drew from the noble hearers a degree of applause, which, as Agelastes had seldom been vain enough to consider as his due, so, on the part of the Knight of Paris and his lady, had it been but rarely conferred.

They had walked for some time by a path which sometimes seemed to hide itself among the woods that came down to the shore of the Propontis, sometimes emerged from concealment, and skirted the open margin of the strait, while, at every turn, it seemed guided by the desire to select a choice and contrast of beauty. Variety of scenes and manners enlivened, from their novelty, the landscape to the pilgrims. By the sea-shore, nymphs were seen dancing, and shepherds piping, or beating the tambourine to their steps, as represented in some groups of ancient statuary. The very faces had a singular resemblance to the antique. If old, their long robes, their attitudes, and magnificent heads, presented the ideas which distinguish prophets and saints; while, on the other hand, the features of the young recalled the expressive countenances of the heroes of antiquity, and the charms of those lovely females by whom their deeds were inspired.

But the race of the Greeks was no longer to be seen, even in its native country, unmixed, or in absolute purity; on the contrary, they saw groups of persons with features which argued a different descent.

In a retiring bosom of the shore, which was traversed by the path, the rocks, receding from the beach, rounded off a spacious portion of level sand, and, in some degree, enclosed it. A party of heathen Scythians whom they beheld, presented the deformed features of the demons they were said to worship—flat noses with expanded nostrils, which seemed to admit the sight to their very brain; faces which extended rather in breadth than length, with strange unintellectual eyes placed in the extremity; figures short and dwarfish, yet garnished with legs and arms of astonishing sinewy strength, disproportioned to their bodies. As the travellers passed, the savages held a species of tournament, as the Count termed it. In this they exercised themselves by darting at each other long reeds, or canes, balanced for the purpose, which, in this rude sport, they throw with such force, as not unfrequently

to strike each other from their steeds, and otherwise to cause serious damage. Some of the combatants being, for the time, out of the play, devoured with greedy looks the beauty of the Countess, and eyed her in such a manner, that she said to Count Robert,—“I have never known fear, my husband, nor is it for me to acknowledge it now, but if disgust be an ingredient of it, these misformed brutes are qualified to inspire it.”

“What, ho, Sir Knight!” exclaimed one of the infidels, “your wife, or your lady love, has committed a fault against the privileges of the Imperial Scythians, and not small will be the penalty she has incurred. You may go your way as fast as you will out of this place, which is, for the present, our hippodrome, or atmeidan, call it which you will, as you prize the Roman or the Saracen language; but for your wife, if the sacrament has united you, believe my word, that she parts not so soon nor so easy.”

“Scoundrel heathen,” said the Christian Knight, “dost thou hold that language to a Peer of France?”

Agelastes here interposed, and using the sounding language of a Grecian courtier, reminded the Scythians (mercenary soldiers, as they seemed, of the empire), that all violence against the European pilgrims, was, by the Imperial orders, strictly prohibited under pain of death.

“I know better,” said the exulting savage, shaking one or two javelins with broad steel heads, and wings of the eagle’s feather, which last were dabbled in blood. “Ask the wings of my javelin,” he said, “in whose heart’s blood these feathers have been dyed. They shall reply to you, that if Alexius Comnenus be the friend of the European pilgrims, it is only while he looks upon them; and we are too exemplary soldiers to serve our Emperor otherwise than he wishes to be served.”

“Peace, Toxartis,” said the philosopher, “thou beliest thine Emperor.”

“Peace thou!” said Toxartis, “or I will do a deed that misbecomes a soldier, and rid the world of a prating old man.”

So saying, he put forth his hand to take hold of the Countess’s veil. With the readiness which frequent use had given to the warlike lady, she withdrew herself from the heathen’s grasp, and with her trenchant sword dealt him so sufficient a blow, that Toxartis lay lifeless on the plain. The Count leaped on the fallen leader’s steed and crying his war-cry, “Son of Charlemagne, to the rescue!” he rode amid the rout of heathen cavaliers with a battle-axe which he found at the saddlebow of the deceased chieftain, and wielding it with remorseless dexterity, he soon slew or wounded, or compelled to flight, the objects of his resentment; nor was there any of them who abode an instant to support the boast which they had made.

“The despicable churls!” said the Countess to Agelastes; “it irks me that a drop of such

coward blood should stain the hands of a noble knight. They call their exercise a tournament, although in their whole exertions every blow is aimed behind the back, and not one has the courage to throw his wandlestraw while he perceives that of another pointed against himself.”

“Such is their custom,” said Agelastes; “not perhaps so much from cowardice as from habit, in exercising before his Imperial Majesty. I have seen that Toxartis literally turn his back upon the mark when he bent his bow in full career, and when in the act of galloping the farthest from his object, he pierced it through the very centre with a broad arrow.”

“A force of such soldiers,” said Count Robert, who had now rejoined his friends, “could not, methinks, be very formidable, where there was but an ounce of genuine courage in the assailants.”

“Meantime, let us pass on to my kiosk,” said Agelastes, “lest the fugitives find friends to encourage them in thoughts of revenge.”

“Such friends,” said Count Robert, “methinks the insolent heathens ought not to find in any land which calls itself Christian; and if I survive the conquest of the Holy Sepulchre, I shall make it my first business to inquire by what right your Emperor retains in his service a band of Paynim and unmannerly cut-throats, who dare offer injury upon the highway, which ought to be sacred to the peace of God and the king, and to noble ladies and inoffensive pilgrims. It is one of a list of many questions, which, my vow accomplished, I will not fail to put to him; ay, and expecting an answer, as they say, prompt and categorical.”

“You shall gain no answer from me though,” said Agelastes to himself. “Your demands, Sir Knight, are over-peremptory, and imposed under too rigid conditions, to be replied to by those who can evade them.”

He changed the conversation, accordingly, with easy dexterity; and they had not proceeded much farther, before they reached a spot, the natural beauties of which called forth the admiration of his foreign companions. A copious brook gushing out of the woodland, descended to the sea with no small noise and tumult; and, as if disdainful a quieter course, which it might have gained by a little circuit to the right, it took the readiest road to the ocean, plunging over the face of a lofty and barren precipice which overhung the sea-shore, and from thence led its little tribute, with as much noise as if it had the stream of a full river to boast of, to the waters of the Hellespont.

The rock, we have said, was bare, unless in so far as it was clothed with the foaming waters of the cataract; but the banks on each side were covered with plane-trees, walnut-trees, cypresses, and other kinds of large timber proper to the East. The fall of water, always agreeable in a warm climate, and generally produced by artificial means, was here natural, and had been

chosen, something like the Sibyl’s temple at Tivoli, for the seat of a goddess to whom the invention of Polytheism had assigned a sovereignty over the department around. The shrine was small and circular, like many of the lesser temples of the rustic deities, and enclosed by the wall of an outer court. After its desecration, it had probably been converted into a luxurious summer retreat by Agelastes, or some Epicurean philosopher. As the building, itself of a light, airy, and fantastic character, was dimly seen through the branches and foliage on the edge of the rock, so the mode by which it was accessible was not at first apparent amongst the mist of the cascade. A pathway, a good deal hidden by vegetation, ascended by a gentle acclivity, and prolonged by the architect by means of a few broad and easy marble steps, making part of the original approach, conducted the passenger to a small, but exquisitely lovely velvet lawn, in front of the turret or temple we have described, the back part of which building overhung the cataract.

## CHAPTER XII.

The parties met. The wily, wordy Greek,  
Weighing each word, and canvassing each syllable,  
Evasive, arguing, equivocating,  
And the stern Frank came with his two-hand sword,  
Watching to see which way the balance sways,  
That he may throw it in, and turn the scales.

PALESTINE.

AT a signal made by Agelastes, the door of this romantic retreat was opened by Diogenes, the negro slave, to whom our readers have been already introduced; nor did it escape the wily old man, that the Count and his lady testified some wonder at his form and lineaments, being the first African perhaps whom they had ever seen so closely. The philosopher lost not the opportunity of making an impression on their minds, by a display of the superiority of his knowledge.

“This poor being,” he observed, “is of the race of Ham, the undutiful son of Noah; for his transgressions against his parent, he was banished to the sands of Africa, and was condemned to be the father of a race doomed to be the slaves of the issue of his more dutiful brethren.”

The knight and his lady gazed on the wonderful appearance before them, and did not, it may be believed, think of doubting the information, which was so much of a piece with their prejudices, while their opinion of their host was greatly augmented by the supposed extent of his knowledge.

“It gives pleasure to a man of humanity,” continued Agelastes, “when, in old age, or sickness, we must employ the services of others, which is at other times scarce lawful, to choose his assistants out of a race of beings, hewers of wood and drawers of water—from their birth up wards destined to slavery; and to whom, therefore, by employing them as slaves, we render no

injury, but carry into effect, in a slight degree, the intentions of the Great Being who made us all."

"Are there many of a race," said the Countess, "so singularly unhappy in their destination? I have hitherto thought the stories of black men as idle as those which minstrels tell of fairies and ghosts."

"Do not believe so," said the philosopher; "the race is numerous as the sands of the sea, neither are they altogether unhappy in discharging the duties which their fate has allotted them. Those who are of worse character suffer even in this life the penance due to their guilt; they become the slaves of the cruel and tyrannical, are beaten, starved, and mutilated. To those whose moral characters are better, better masters are provided, who share with their slaves, as with their children, food and raiment, and the other good things which they themselves enjoy. To some, Heaven allots the favor of kings and of conquerors, and to a few, but those the chief favorites of the species, hath been assigned a place in the mansions of philosophy, where, by availing themselves of the lights which their masters can afford, they gain a prospect into that world which is the residence of true happiness."

"Methinks I understand you," replied the Countess, "and if so, I ought rather to envy our sable friend here than to pity him, for having been allotted in the partition of his kind to the possession of his present master, from whom, doubtless, he has acquired the desirable knowledge which you mention."

"He learns, at least," said Agelastes, modestly, "what I can teach, and, above all, to be contented with his situation.—Diogenes, my good child," said he, changing his address to the slave, "thou seest I have company—What does the poor hermit's larder afford, with which he may regale his honored guests?"

Hitherto they had advanced no farther than a sort of outer room, or hall of entrance, fitted up with no more expense than might have suited one who desired at some outlay, and more taste, to avail himself of the ancient building for a sequestered and private retirement. The chairs and couches were covered with Eastern wove mats, and were of the simplest and most primitive form. But on touching a spring, an interior apartment was displayed, which had considerable pretension to splendor and magnificence.

The furniture and hangings of this apartment were of straw-colored silk, wrought on the looms of Persia, and crossed with embroidery, which produced a rich, yet simple effect. The ceiling was carved in Arabesque, and the four corners of the apartment were formed into recesses for statuary, which had been produced in a better age of art than that which existed at the period of our story. In one nook, a shepherd seemed to withdraw himself, as if ashamed to produce his scantily-covered person while he was willing

to afford the audience the music of the reed which he held in his hand. Three damsels, resembling the Graces in the beautiful proportions of their limbs, and the slender clothing which they wore, lurked in different attitudes, each in her own niche, and seemed but to await the first sound of the music, to bound forth from thence and join in the frolic dance. The subject was beautiful, yet somewhat light, to ornament the study of such a sage as Agelastes represented himself to be.

He seemed to be sensible that this might attract observation.—"These figures," he said, "executed at the period of the highest excellence of Grecian art, were considered of old as the choral nymphs assembled to adore the goddess of the place, waiting but the music to join in the worship of the temple. And, in truth, the wisest may be interested in seeing how near to animation the genius of these wonderful men could bring the inflexible marble. Allow but for the absence of the divine afflatus, or breath of animation, and an unenlightened heathen might suppose the miracle of Prometheus was about to be realized. But we," said he, looking upwards, "are taught to form a better judgment between what man can do and the productions of the Deity."

Some subjects of natural history were painted on the walls, and the philosopher fixed the attention of his guests upon the half-reasoning elephant, of which he mentioned several anecdotes, which they listened to with great eagerness.

A distant strain was here heard, as if of music in the woods, penetrating by fits through the hoarse roar, of the cascade, which, as it sunk immediately below the windows, filled the apartment with its deep voice.

"Apparently," said Agelastes, "the friends whom I expected are approaching, and bring with them the means of enchanting another sense. It is well they do so, since wisdom tells us that we best honor the Deity by enjoying the gifts he has provided us."

These words called the attention of the philosopher's Frankish guests to the preparations exhibited in this tasteful saloon. These were made for an entertainment in the manner of the ancient Romans, and couches, which were laid beside a table ready decked, announced that the male guests, at least, were to assist at the banquet in the usual recumbent posture of the ancients; while seats, placed among the couches, seemed to say that females were expected, who would observe the Grecian customs, in eating seated. The preparations for good cheer were such as, though limited in extent, could scarce be excelled in quality, either by the splendid dishes which decked Trimalchio's banquet of former days, or the lighter delicacies of Grecian cookery, or the succulent and highly-spiced messes indulged in by the nations of the East, to whichever they happened to give the preference; and it was with an air of some vanity that Agel-

## CHAPTER XIII.

AGELASTES gained his threshold before Count Robert of Paris and his lady. He had, therefore, time to make his prostrations before a huge animal, then unknown to the western world, but now universally distinguished as the elephant. On its back was a pavilion or palanquin, within which were enclosed the august persons of the Empress Irene, and her daughter Anna Comnena. Nicephorus Briennius attended the Princesses in the command of a gallant body of light horse, whose splendid armor would have given more pleasure to the crusader, if it had possessed less an air of useless wealth and effeminate magnificence. But the effect which it produced in its appearance was as brilliant as could well be conceived. The officers alone of this *corps de garde* followed Nicephorus to the platform, prostrated themselves while the ladies of the Imperial house descended, and rose up again under a cloud of waving plumes and flashing lances, when they stood secure upon the platform in front of the building. Here the somewhat aged, but commanding form of the Empress, and the still juvenile beauties of the fair historian, were seen to great advantage. In the front of a deep background of spears and waving crests, stood the sounder of the sacred trumpet, conspicuous by his size and the richness of his apparel; he kept his post on a rock above the stone staircase, and, by an occasional note of his instrument, intimated to the squadrons beneath that they should stay their progress, and attend the motions of the Empress and the wife of the Cæsar.

The fair form of the Countess Brenhilda, and the fantastic appearance of her half-masculine garb, attracted the attention of the ladies of Alexius' family, but was too extraordinary to command their admiration. Agelastes became sensible there was a necessity that he should introduce his guests to each other, if he desired they should meet on satisfactory terms. "May I speak," he said, "and live? The armed strangers whom you find now with me are worthy companions of those myriads, whom zeal for the suffering inhabitants of Palestine has brought from the western extremity of Europe, at once to enjoy the countenance of Alexius Comnenus, and to aid him, since it pleases him to accept their assistance, in expelling the Paynims from the bounds of the sacred empire, and garrison those regions in their stead, as vassals of his Imperial Majesty."

"We are pleased," said the Empress, "worthy Agelastes, that you should be kind to those who are disposed to be so reverent to the Emperor. And we are rather disposed to talk with them ourselves, that our daughter (whom Apollo hath gifted with the choice talent of recording what she sees) may become acquainted with one of those female warriors of the West, of whom we have heard so much by common fame, and yet know so little with certainty."

Agelastes asked his guests to share a poor pilgrim's meal.

"We care little for dainties," said the Count; "nor does our present course of life as pilgrims, bound by a vow, allow us much choice on such subjects. Whatever is food for soldiers, suffices the Countess and myself; for, with our will, we would at every hour be ready for battle, and the less time we use in preparing for the field, it is even so much the better. Sit then, Brenhilda, since the good man will have it so, and let us lose no time in refreshment, lest we waste that which should be otherwise employed."

"A moment's forgiveness," said Agelastes, "until the arrival of my other friends, whose music you may now hear is close at hand, and who will not long, I may safely promise, divide you from your meal."

"For that," said the Count, "there is no haste; and since you seem to account it a part of civil manners, Brenhilda and I can with ease postpone our repast, unless you will permit us, what I own would be more pleasing, to take a morsel of bread and a cup of water presently; and, thus refreshed, to leave the space clear for your more curious and more familiar guests."

"The saints above forbid!" said Agelastes; "guests so honored never pressed these cushions, nor could do so, if the sacred family of the imperial Alexius himself even now stood at the gate."

He had hardly uttered these words, when the full-blown peal of a trumpet, louder in a tenfold degree than the strains of music they had before heard, was now sounded in the front of the temple, piercing through the murmur of the waterfall, as a Damascus blade penetrates the armor, and assailing the ears of the hearers, as the sword pierces the flesh of him who wears the harness.

"You seem surprised or alarmed, father," said Count Robert. "Is there danger near, and do you distrust our protection?"

"No," said Agelastes, "that would give me confidence in any extremity; but these sounds excite awe, not fear. They tell me that some of the imperial family are about to be my guests. Yet fear nothing, my noble friends—they, whose look is life, are ready to shower their favors with profusion upon strangers so worthy of honor as they will see here. Meantime, my brow must touch my threshold, in order duly to welcome them." So saying, he hurried to the outer door of the building.

"Each land has its customs," said the Count, as he followed his host, with his wife hanging on his arm; "but, Brenhilda, as they are so various, it is little wonder that they appear unseemly to each other. Here, however, in deference to my entertainer, I stoop my crest, in the manner which seems to be required." So saying, he followed Agelastes into the anteroom, where a new scene awaited them.

"Madam," said the Count, "I can but rudely express to you what I have to find fault with in the explanation which this old man hath given of our purpose in coming hither. Certain it is, we neither owe Alexius fealty, nor had we the purpose of paying him any, when we took the vow upon ourselves which brought us against Asia. We came, because we understood that the Holy Land had been torn from the Greek Emperor by the Pagans, Saracens, Turks, and other infidels, from whom we are come to win it back. The wisest and most prudent among us have judged it necessary to acknowledge the Emperor's authority, since there was no such safe way of passing to the discharge of our vow, as that of acknowledging fealty to him, as the best mode of preventing quarrels among Christian States. We, though independent of any earthly king, do not pretend to be greater men than they, and therefore have condescended to pay the same homage."

The Empress colored several times with indignation in the course of this speech, which, in more passages than one, was at variance with those imperial maxims of the Grecian court, which held its dignity so high, and plainly intimated a tone of opinion which was depreciating to the Emperor's power. But the Empress Irene had received instructions from her imperial spouse to beware how she gave, or even took, any ground of quarrel with the crusaders, who, though coming in the appearance of subjects, were, nevertheless, too punctilious and ready to take fire, to render them safe discussers of delicate differences. She made a graceful reverence accordingly, as if she had scarce understood what the Count of Paris had explained so bluntly.

At this moment the appearance of the principal persons on either hand attracted, in a wonderful degree, the attention of the other party, and there seemed to exist among them a general desire of further acquaintance, and, at the same time, a manifest difficulty in expressing such a wish.

Agelastes—to begin with the master of the house—had risen from the ground indeed, but without venturing to assume an upright posture; he remained before the Imperial ladies with his body and head still bent, his hand interposed between his eyes and their faces, like a man that would shade his eyesight from the level sun, and awaited in silence the commands of those to whom he seemed to think it disrespectful to propose the slightest action, save by testifying in general, that his house and his slaves were at their unlimited command. The Countess of Paris, on the other hand, and her warlike husband, were the peculiar objects of curiosity to Irene, and her accomplished daughter, Anna Comnena; and it occurred to both these Imperial ladies, that they had never seen finer specimens of human strength and beauty; but by a natural instinct, they preferred the manly bearing of the husband to that of the wife, which seemed to her own sex rather

too haughty and too masculine to be altogether pleasing.

Count Robert and his lady had also their own object of attention in the newly-arrived group, and, to speak truth, it was nothing else than the peculiarities of the monstrous animal which they now saw, for the first time, employed as a beast of burden in the service of the fair Irene and her daughter. The dignity and splendor of the elder Princess, the grace and vivacity of the younger, were alike lost in Brenhilda's earnest inquiries into the history of the elephant, and the use which it made of its trunk, tusks, and huge ears, upon different occasions.

Another person, who took a less direct opportunity to gaze on Brenhilda with a deep degree of interest, was the Caesar, Nicephorus. This Prince kept his eyes steadily upon the Frankish Countess as he could well do, without attracting the attention, and exciting perhaps the suspicions, of his wife and mother-in-law; he therefore endeavored to restore speech to an interview which would have been awkward without it. "It is possible," he said, "beautiful Countess, that this being your first visit to the Queen of the World, you have never hitherto seen the singularly curious animal called the elephant."

"Pardon me," said the Countess, "I have been treated by this learned gentleman to a sight, and some account of that wonderful creature."

By all who heard this observation, the Lady Brenhilda was supposed to have made a satirical thrust at the philosopher himself, who, in the imperial court, usually went by the name of the Elephant.

"No one could describe the beast more accurately than Agelastes," said the Princess, with a smile of intelligence, which went round her attendants.

"He knows its docility, its sensibility, and its fidelity," said the philosopher, in a subdued tone.

"True, good Agelastes," said the Princess; "we should not criticise the animal which kneels to take us up.—Come, lady of a foreign land," she continued, turning to the Frank Count, and especially his Countess—"and you her gallant lord! When you return to your native country, you shall say you have seen the Imperial family partake of their food, and in so far acknowledge themselves to be of the same clay with other mortals, sharing their poorest wants, and relieving them in the same manner."

"That, gentle lady, I can well believe," said Count Robert; "my curiosity would be more indulged by seeing this strange animal at his food."

"You will see the elephant more conveniently at his mess within doors," answered the Princess, looking at Agelastes.

"Lady," said Brenhilda, "I would not willingly refuse an invitation given in courtesy, but the sun has waxed low unnoticed, and we must return to the city."

"Be not afraid," said the fair historian; "you

shall have the advantage of our Imperial escort to protect you in your return."

"Fear?—afraid?—escort?—protect?—These are words I know not. Know, lady, that my husband, the noble Count of Paris, is my sufficient escort; and even were he not with me, Brenhilda de Aspramonte fears nothing, and can defend herself."

"Fair daughter," said Agelastes, "if I may be permitted to speak, you mistake the gracious intentions of the Princess, who expresses herself as to a lady of her own land. What she desires is to learn from you some of the most marked habits and manners of the Franks, of which you are so beautiful an example; and in return for such information, the illustrious Princess would be glad to procure your entrance to those spacious collections, where animals from all corners of the habitable world have been assembled at the command of our Emperor Alexius, as if to satisfy the wisdom of those sages to whom all creation is known, from the deer so small in size that it is exceeded by an ordinary rat, to that huge and singular inhabitant of Africa that can browse on the tops of trees that are forty feet high, while the length of its hind legs does not exceed the half of that wondrous height."

"It is enough," said the Countess, with some eagerness; but Agelastes had got a point of discussion after his own mind.

"There is also," he said, "that huge lizard, which, resembling in shape the harmless inhabitant of the moors of other countries, is in Egypt a monster thirty feet in length, clothed in impenetrable scales, and moaning over his prey when he catches it, with the hope and purpose of drawing others within his danger, by mimicking the lamentations of humanity."

"Say no more, father!" exclaimed the lady. "My Robert, we will go—will we not, where such objects are to be seen?"

"There is also," said Agelastes, who saw that he would gain his point by addressing himself to the curiosity of the strangers, "the huge animal, wearing on its back an invulnerable vestment, having on its nose a horn, and sometimes two, the folds of whose hide are of the most immense thickness, and which never knight was able to wound."

"We will go, Robert—will we not?" reiterated the Countess.

"Ay," replied the Count, "and teach these Easterns how to judge of a knight's sword by a single blow of my trusty Tranchefer."

"And who knows," said Brenhilda, "since this is a land of enchantment, but what some person, who is languishing in a foreign shape, may have their enchantment unexpectedly dissolved by a stroke of the good weapon?"

"Say no more, father!" exclaimed the Count. "We will attend this Princess since such she is, were her whole escort bent to oppose our passage, instead of being by her command to be our guard. For know, all who hear me, thus much

of the nature of the Franks, that when you tell us of danger and difficulties, you give us the same desire to travel the road where they lie, as other men have in seeking either pleasure or profit in the paths in which such are to be found."

As the Count pronounced these words, he struck his hand upon his Tranchefer, as an illustration of the manner in which he proposed upon occasion to make good his way. The courtly circle startled somewhat at the clash of steel, and the fiery look of the chivalrous Count Robert. The Empress indulged her alarm by retreating into the inner apartment of the pavilion.

With a grace, which was rarely deigned to any but those in close alliance with the Imperial family, Anna Comnena took the arm of the noble Count. "I see," she said, "that the Imperial Mother has honored the house of the learned Agelastes, by leading the way; therefore, to teach you Grecian breeding must fall to my share." Saying this she conducted him to the inner apartment.

"Fear not for your wife," she said, as she noticed the Frank look round; "our husband, like ourselves, has pleasure in showing attention to the stranger, and will lead the Countess to our board. It is not the custom of the Imperial family to eat in company with strangers; but we thank Heaven for having instructed us in that civility, which can know no degradation in dispensing with ordinary rules to do honor to strangers of such merit as yours. I know it will be my mother's request, that you will take your places without ceremony; and also, although the grace be somewhat particular, I am sure that it will have my Imperial father's approbation."

"Be it as your ladyship lists," said Count Robert. "There are few men to whom I would yield place at the board, if they had not gone before me in the battle-field. To a lady, especially so fair a one, I willingly yield my place, and bend my knee, whenever I have the good hap to meet her."

The Princess Anna, instead of feeling herself awkward in the discharge of the extraordinary, and as she might have thought it, degrading office of ushering a barbarian chief to the banquet, felt, on the contrary, flattered, at having bent to her purpose a heart so obstinate as that of Count Robert, and elated, perhaps, with a certain degree of satisfied pride while under his momentary protection.

The Empress Irene had already seated herself at the head of the table. She looked with some astonishment, when her daughter and son-in-law, taking their seats at her right and left hand, invited the Count and Countess of Paris, the former to recline, the latter to sit at the board, in the places next to themselves; but she had received the strictest orders from her husband to be deferential in every respect to the strangers, and did not think it right, therefore, to interpose any ceremonious scruples.

The Countess took her seat, as indicated, be

side the Cæsar; and the Count, instead of reclining in the mode of the Grecian men, also seated himself in the European fashion by the Princess.

"I will not lie prostrate," said he, laughing, "except in consideration of a blow weighty enough to compel me to do so; nor then either, if I am able to start up and return it."

The service of the table then began, and, to say truth, it appeared to be an important part of the business of the day. The officers who attended to perform their several duties of deckers of the table, sewers of the banquet, removers and tasters to the Imperial family, thronged into the banqueting-room, and seemed to vie with each other in calling upon Agelastes for spices, condiments, sauces, and wines of various kinds, the variety and multiplicity of their demands being apparently devised *ex proposito*, for stirring the patience of the philosopher. But Agelastes, who had anticipated most of their requests, however unusual, supplied them completely, or in the greatest part, by the ready agency of his active slave Diogenes, to whom, at the same time, he contrived to transfer all blame for the absence of such articles as he was unable to provide.

"Be Homer my witness, the accomplished Virgil, and the curious felicity of Horace, that, trifling and unworthy as this banquet was, my note of directions to this thrice unhappy slave gave the instructions to procure every ingredient necessary to convey to each dish its proper gusto.—Ill-omened carrion that thou art, wherefore placest thou the pickled cucumber so far apart from the boar's head? and why are these superb congers unprovided with a requisite quantity of fennel? The divorce betwixt the shell-fish and the Chian wine, in a presence like this, is worthy of the divorce of thine own soul from thy body; or, to say the least, of a lifelong residence in the Pistrinum." While thus the philosopher proceeded with threats, curses, and menaces against his slave, the stranger might have an opportunity of comparing the little torrent of his domestic eloquence, which the manners of the times did not consider as ill-bred, with the louder and deeper share of adulation towards his guests. They mingled like the oil with the vinegar and pickles which Diogenes mixed for the sauce. Thus the Count and Countess had an opportunity to estimate the happiness and the felicity reserved for those slaves, whom the omnipotent Jupiter, in the plenitude of compassion for their state, and in guerdon of their good morals, had dedicated to the service of a philosopher. The share they themselves took in the banquet, was finished with a degree of speed which gave surprise not only to their host, but also to the Imperial guests.

The Count helped himself carelessly out of a dish which stood near him, and partaking of a draught of wine, without inquiring whether it was of the vintage which the Greeks held it matter of conscience to mingle with that species of food, he declared himself satisfied; nor could

the obliging entreaties of his neighbor, Anna Commena induce him to partake of other messes represented as being either delicacies or curiosities. His spouse ate still more moderately of the food which seemed most simply cooked, and stood nearest her at the board, and partook of a cup of crystal water, which she slightly tinged with wine, at the persevering entreaty of the Cæsar. They then relinquished the farther business of the banquet, and leaning back upon their seats, occupied themselves in watching the liberal credit done to the feast by the rest of the guests present.

A modern synod of gourmands would hardly have equalled the Imperial family of Greece seated at a philosophical banquet, whether in the critical knowledge displayed of the science of eating in all its branches, or in the practical cost and patience with which they exercised it. The ladies, indeed, did not eat much of any one dish, but they tasted of almost all that were presented to them, and their name was Legion. Yet, after a short time, in Homeric phrase, the rage of thirst and hunger was assuaged, or, more probably, the Princess Anna Commena was tired of being an object of some inattention to the guest who sat next her, and who, joining his high military character to his very handsome presence, was a person by whom few ladies would willingly be neglected. There is no new guise, says our father Chaucer, but that resembles an old one; and the address of Anna Commena to the Frankish Count might resemble that of a modern lady of fashion, in her attempts to engage in conversation the *exquisite*, who sits by her side in an apparently absent fit. "We have piped unto you," said the Princess, "and you have not danced! We have sung to you the jovial choros of *Evoe, evoe*, and you will neither worship Comus nor Bacchus! Are we then to judge you a follower of the Muses, in whose service, as well as in that of Phœbus, we ourselves pretend to be enlisted?"

"Fair lady," replied the Frank, "be not offended at my stating once for all, in plain terms, that I am a Christian man, spitting at, and bidding defiance to Apollo, Bacchus, Comus, and all other heathen deities whatsoever."

"O! cruel interpretation of my unwary words!" said the Princess; "I did but mention the gods of music, poetry, and eloquence, worshipped by our divine philosophers, and whose names are still used to distinguish the arts and sciences over which they presided—and the Count interprets it seriously into a breach of the second commandment! Our Lady preserve me, we must take care how we speak, when our words are so sharply interpreted."

The Count laughed as the Princess spoke. "I had no offensive meaning, madam," he said. "nor would I wish to interpret your words otherwise than as being most innocent and praiseworthy. I shall suppose that your speech contained all that was fair and blameless. You are I

have understood, one of those who, like our worthy host, express in composition the history and feats of the warlike time in which you live, and give to the posterity which shall succeed us, the knowledge of the brave deeds which have been achieved in our day. I respect the task to which you have dedicated yourself, and know not how a lady could lay after ages under an obligation to her in the same degree, unless, like my wife, Brenhilda, she were herself to be the actress of deeds which she recorded. And, by the way, she now looks toward her neighbor at the table, as if she were about to rise and leave him; her inclinations are towards Constantinople, and, with your ladyship's permission, I cannot allow her to go thither alone."

"That you shall neither of you do," said Anna Commena; "since we all go to the capital directly, and for the purpose of seeing those wonders of nature, of which numerous examples have been collected by the splendor of my Imperial father.—If my husband seems to have given offence to the Countess, do not suppose that it was intentionally dealt to her; on the contrary, you will find the good man, when you are better acquainted with him, to be one of those simple persons who manage so unhappily what they mean for civilities, that those to whom they are addressed receive them frequently in another sense."

The Countess of Paris, however, refused again to sit down to the table from which she had risen, so that Agelastes and his Imperial guests saw themselves under the necessity either to permit the strangers to depart, which they seemed unwilling to do, or to detain them by force, to attempt which might not perhaps have been either safe or pleasant; or, lastly, to have waived the etiquette of rank and set out along with them, at the same time managing their dignity, so as to take the initiatory step, though the departure took place upon the motion of their wilful guests. Much tumult there was—bustling, disputing, and shouting—among the troops and officers who were thus moved from their repast, two hours at least sooner than had been experienced upon similar occasions in the memory of the oldest among them. A different arrangement of the Imperial party likewise seemed to take place by mutual consent.

Nicephorus Briennius ascended the seat upon the elephant, and remained there placed beside his august mother-in-law. Agelastes, on a sober-minded palfrey, which permitted him to prolong his philosophical harangues at his own pleasure, rode beside the Countess Brenhilda, whom he made the principal object of his oratory. The fair historian, though she usually travelled in a litter, preferred upon this occasion a spirited horse, which enabled her to keep pace with Count Robert of Paris, on whose imagination, if not his feelings, she seemed to have it in view to work a marked impression. The conversation of the Empress with her son-in-law requires no

special detail. It was a tissue of criticisms upon the manners and behavior of the Franks, and a hearty wish that they might be soon transported from the realms of Greece, never more to return. Such was at least the tone of the Empress, nor did the Cæsar find it convenient to express any more tolerant opinion of the strangers. On the other hand, Agelastes made a long circuit ere he ventured to approach the subject which he wished to introduce. He spoke of the menagerie of the Emperor as a most superb collection of natural history; he extolled different persons at court for having encouraged Alexius Comnenus in this wise and philosophical amusement. But, finally, the praise of all others was abandoned that the philosopher might dwell upon that of Nicephorus Briennius, to whom the cabinet or collection of Constantinople was indebted, he said, for the principal treasures it contained.

"I am glad it is so," said the haughty Countess, without lowering her voice, or affecting any change of manner; "I am glad that he understands some things better worth understanding than whispering with stranger young women. Credit me, if he gives much license to his tongue among such women of my country as these stirring times may bring hither, some one or other of them will fling him into the cataract which dashes below."

"Pardon me, fair lady," said Agelastes; "no female heart could meditate an action so atrocious against so fine a form as that of the Cæsar Nicephorus Briennius."

"Put it not on that issue, father," said the offended Countess; "for, by my patroness Saint, Our Lady of the Broken Lances, had it not been for regard to these two ladies, who seemed to intend some respect to my husband and myself, that same Nicephorus should have been as perfectly a Lord of the Broken Bones as any Cæsar who has borne the title since the great Julius!"

The philosopher, upon this explicit information, began to entertain some personal fear for himself, and hastened, by diverting the conversation, which he did with great dexterity, to the story of Hero and Leander, to put the affront received out of the head of this unscrupulous Amazon.

Meantime, Count Robert of Paris was engrossed, as it may be termed, by the fair Anna Commena. She spoke on all subjects, on some better, doubtless, others worse, but on none did she suspect herself of any deficiency; while the good Count wished heartily within himself that his companion had been safely in bed with the enchanted Princess of Zulichium. She performed, right or wrong, the part of panegyrist of the Normans, until at length the Count, tired of hearing her prate of she knew not exactly what, broke in as follows:—

"Lady," he said, "notwithstanding I and my followers are sometimes so named, yet we are not Normans, who come hither as a numerous

and separate body of pilgrims, under the command of their Duke Robert, a valiant, though extravagant, thoughtless, and weak man. I say nothing against the fame of these Normans. They conquered, in our fathers' days, a kingdom far stronger than their own, which men call England; I see that you entertain some of the natives of which country in your pay, under the name of Varangians. Although defeated, as I said, by the Normans, they are, nevertheless, a brave race; nor would we think ourselves much dishonored by mixing in battle with them. Still we are the valiant Franks, who had their dwelling on the eastern banks of the Rhine and of the Saale, who were converted to the Christian faith by the celebrated Clovis, and are sufficient, by our numbers and courage, to reconquer the Holy Land, should all Europe besides stand neutral in the contest."

There are few things more painful to the vanity of a person like the Princess, than the being detected in an egregious error, at the moment she is taking credit to herself for being peculiarly accurately informed.

"A false slave, who knew not what he was saying, I suppose," said the Princess, "imposed upon me the belief that the Varangians were the natural enemies of the Normans. I see him marching there by the side of Achilles Tatius, the leader of his corps.—Call him hither, you officers!—Yonder tall man, I mean, with the battle-axe upon his shoulder."

Hereward, distinguished by his post at the head of the squadron, was summoned from thence to the presence of the Princess, where he made his military obeisance with a cast of sternness in his aspect, as his glance lighted upon the proud look of the Frenchman who rode beside Anna Comnena.

"Did I not understand thee, fellow," said Anna Comnena, "to have informed me, nearly a month ago, that the Normans and the Franks were the same people, and enemies to the race from which you spring?"

"The Normans are our mortal enemies, Lady," answered Hereward, "by whom we were driven from our native land. The Franks are subjects of the same Lord-Paramount with the Normans, and therefore they neither love the Varangians, nor are beloved by them."

"Good fellow," said the French Count, "you do the Franks wrong, and ascribe to the Varangians, although not unnaturally, an undue degree of importance, when you suppose that a race which has ceased to exist as an independent nation for more than a generation, can be either an object of interest or resentment to such as we are."

"I am no stranger," said the Varangian, "to the pride of your heart, or the precedence which you assume over those who have been less fortunate in war than yourselves. It is God who casteth down and who buildeth up, nor is there in the world a prospect to which the Varangians

would look forward with more pleasure than that a hundred of their number should meet in a fair field, either with the oppressive Normans, or their modern compatriots, the vain Frenchmen, and let God be the judge which is most worthy of victory."

"You take an insolent advantage of the chance," said the Count of Paris, "which gives you an unlooked-for opportunity to brave a nobleman."

"It is my sorrow and shame," said the Varangian, "that that opportunity is not complete; and that there is a chain around me which forbids me to say, Slay me, or I'll kill thee before we part from this spot!"

"Why, thou foolish and hot-brained churl," replied the Count, "what right hast thou to the honor of dying by my blade? Thou art mad, or hast drained the ale-cup so deeply that thou knowest not what thou thinkest or sayest."

"Thou liest," said the Varangian; "though such a reproach be the utmost scandal of thy race."

The Frenchman motioned his hand quicker than light to his sword, but instantly withdrew it, and said with dignity, "Thou canst not offend me."

"But thou," said the exile, "hast offended me in a matter which can only be atoned by thy manhood."

"Where and how?" answered the Count; "although it is needless to ask the question, which thou canst not answer rationally."

"Thou hast this day," answered the Varangian, "put a mortal affront upon a great prince, whom thy master calls his ally, and by whom thou hast been received with every rite of hospitality. Him thou hast affronted as one peasant at a merry-making would do shame to another, and this dishonor thou hast done to him in the very face of his own chiefs and princes, and the nobles from every court of Europe."

"It was thy master's part to resent my conduct," said the Frenchman, "if in reality he so much felt it as an affront."

"But that," said Hereward, "did not consist with the manners of his country to do. Besides that, we trusty Varangians esteem ourselves bound by our oath as much to defend our Emperor, while the service lasts, on every inch of his honor as on every foot of his territory; I therefore tell thee, Sir Knight, Sir Count, or whatever thou callest thyself, there is mortal quarrel between thee and the Varangian guard, ever and until thou hast fought it out in fair and manly battle, body to body, with one of the said Imperial Varangians, when duty and opportunity shall permit:—and so God schaw the right!"

As this passed in the French language, the meaning escaped the understanding of such Imperialists as were within hearing at the time and the Princess, who waited with some astonishment till the Crusader and the Varangian had finished their conference, when it was over said

to him with interest, "I trust you feel that poor man's situation to be too much at a distance from your own, to admit of your meeting him in what is termed knightly battle?"

"On such a question," said the knight, "I nave but one answer to any lady who does not, like my Brenhilda, cover herself with a shield, and bear a sword by her side, and the heart of a knight in her bosom."

"And suppose for once," said the Princess Anna Comnena, "that I possessed such titles to your confidence, what would your answer be to me?"

"There can be little reason for concealing it," said the Count. "The Varangian is a brave man, and a strong one; it is contrary to my vow to shun his challenge, and perhaps I shall derogate from my rank by accepting it; but the world is wide, and he is yet to be born who has seen Robert of Paris shun the face of mortal man. By means of some gallant officer among the Emperor's guards, this poor fellow, who nourishes so strange an ambition, shall learn that he shall have his wish gratified."

"And then—?" said Anna Comnena.

"Why, then," said the Count, "in the poor man's own language, God schaw the right!"

"Which is to say," said the Princess, "that if my father has an officer of his guards honorable enough to forward so pious and reasonable a purpose, the Emperor must lose an ally, in whose faith he puts confidence, or a most trusty and faithful soldier of his personal guard, who has distinguished himself upon many occasions?"

"I am happy to hear," said the Count, "that the man bears such a character. In truth, his ambition ought to have some foundation. The more I think of it, the rather am I of opinion that there is something generous, rather than derogatory, in giving to the poor exile, whose thoughts are so high and noble, those privileges of a man of rank, which some who were born in such lofty station are too cowardly to avail themselves of. Yet despond not, noble Princess; the challenge is not yet accepted of, and if it was, the issue is in the hand of God. As for me, whose trade is war, the sense that I have something so serious to transact with this resolute man, will keep me from other less honorable quarrels, in which a lack of occupation might be apt to involve me."

The Princess made no further observation, being resolved, by private remonstrance to Achilles Tatius, to engage him to prevent a meeting which might be fatal to the one or the other of two brave men. The town now darkened before them, sparkling, at the same time, through its obscurity, by the many lights which illuminated the houses of the citizens. The royal cavalcade held their way to the Golden Gate, where the trusty centurion put his guard under arms to receive them."

"We must now break off, fair ladies," said

the Count, as the party having now dismounted, were standing together at the private gate of the Blacquernal Palace, "and find as we can, the lodgings which we occupied last night."

"Under your favor, no," said the Empress. "You must be content to take your supper and repose in quarters more fitting your rank; and," added Irene, "with no worse quartermaster than one of the Imperial family who has been your travelling companion."

This the Count heard, with considerable inclination to accept the hospitality which was so readily offered. Although as devoted as a man could well be to the charms of his Brenhilda, the very idea never having entered his head of preferring another's beauty to hers, yet, nevertheless, he had naturally felt himself flattered by the attentions of a woman of eminent beauty and very high rank; and the praises with which the Princess had loaded him had not entirely fallen to the ground. He was no longer in the humor in which the morning had found him, disposed to outrage the feelings of the Emperor, and to insult his dignity; but, flattered by the adroit sycophancy which the old philosopher had learned from the schools, and the beautiful Princess had been gifted with by nature, he assented to the Empress's proposal; the more readily, perhaps, that the darkness did not permit him to see that there was distinctly a shade of displeasure on the brow of Brenhilda. Whatever the cause, she cared not to express it, and the married pair had just entered that labyrinth of passages through which Hereward had formerly wandered, when a chamberlain and a female attendant, richly dressed, bent the knee before them, and offered them the means and place to adjust their attire, ere they entered the Imperial presence. Brenhilda looked upon her apparel and arms, spotted with the blood of the insolent Scythian, and, Amazon as she was, felt the shame of being carelessly and improperly dressed. The arms of the knight were also bloody, and in disarrangement.

"Tell my female squire, Agatha, to give her attendance," said the Countess. "She alone is in the habit of assisting to unarm and to attire me."

"Now, God be praised," thought the Grecian lady of the bed-chamber, "that I am not called to a toilet where smiths' hammers and tongs are like to be the instruments most in request!"

"Tell Marcian, my armorer," said the Count, "to attend with the silver and blue suit of plate and mail which I won in a wager from the Count of Thoulouse."\*

"Might I not have the honor of adjusting your armor," said a splendidly dressed courtier, with some marks of the armorer's profession, "since

\* Raymond, Count of Thoulouse and St. Giles, Duke of Carbone, and Marquis of Provence, an aged warrior who had won high distinction in the contests against the Saracens in Spain, was the chief leader of the Crusaders from the South of France. His title of St. Giles is corrupted by Anne Comnena into *Sangle*, by which name she constantly mentions him in the *Alexiad*.

I have put on that of the Emperor himself?—may his name be sacred!"

"And how many rivets hast thou clenched upon the occasion with this hand?" said the Count, catching hold of it, "which looks as if it had never been washed, save with milk of roses,—and with this childish toy?" pointing to a hammer with ivory haft and silver head, which, stuck in a milk-white kidskin apron, the official wore as badges of his duty. The armorer fell back in some confusion. "His grasp," he said to another domestic, "is like the seizure of a vice."

While this little scene passed apart, the Empress Irene, her daughter, and her son-in-law, left the company, under pretence of making a necessary change in their apparel. Immediately after, Agelastes was required to attend the Emperor, and the strangers were conducted to two adjacent chambers of retirement, splendidly fitted up, and placed for the present at their disposal, and that of their attendants. There we shall for a time leave them, assuming, with the assistance of their own attendants, a dress which their ideas regarded as most fit for a great occasion; those of the Grecian court willingly keeping apart from a task which they held nearly as formidable as assisting at the lair of a royal tiger or his bride.

Agelastes found the Emperor sedulously arranging his most splendid court-dress; for, as in the court of Pekin, the change of ceremonial attire was a great part of the ritual observed at Constantinople.

"Thou hast done well, wise Agelastes," said Alexius to the philosopher, as he approached with abundance of prostrations and genuflections—"thou hast done well, and we are content with thee. Less than thy wit and address must have failed in separating from their company this tameless bull, and unyoked heifer, over whom, if we obtain influence, we shall command, by every account, no small interest among those who esteem them the bravest in the host."

"My humble understanding," said Agelastes, "had been infinitely inferior to the management of so prudent and sagacious a scheme, had it not been shaped forth and suggested by the inimitable wisdom of your most sacred Imperial Highness."

"We are aware," said Alexius, "that we had the merit of blocking forth the scheme of detaining these persons, either by their choice as allies, or by main force as hostages. Their friends, ere yet they have missed them, will be engaged in war with the Turks, and at no liberty, if the devil should suggest such an undertaking, to take arms against the sacred empire. Thus, Agelastes, we shall obtain hostages at least as important and as valuable as that Count of Vermandois, whose liberty the tremendous Godfrey of Bouillon extorted from us by threats of instant war."

"Pardon," said Agelastes, "if I add another reason to those which of themselves so happily support your august resolution. It is possible

that we may, by observing the greatest caution and courtesy towards these strangers, win them in good earnest to our side."

"I conceive you, I conceive you"—said the Emperor; "and this very night I will exhibit myself to this Count and his lady in the royal presence-chamber, in the richest robes which our wardrobe can furnish. The lions of Solomon shall roar, the golden tree of Comnenus shall display its wonders, and the feeble eyes of these Franks shall be altogether dazzled by the splendor of the empire. These spectacles cannot but sink into their minds, and dispose them to become the allies and servants of a nation so much more powerful, skilful, and wealthy than their own.—Thou hast something to say, Agelastes. Years and long study have made thee wise; though we have given our opinion, thou mayst speak thine own, and live."

Thrice three times did Agelastes press his brow against the hem of the Emperor's garment, and great seemed his anxiety to find such words as might intimate his dissent from his sovereign, yet save him from the informality of contradicting him expressly.

"These sacred words in which your sacred Highness has uttered your most just and accurate opinions, are undeniable, and incapable of contradiction, were any vain enough to attempt to impugn them. Nevertheless, be it lawful to say, that men show the wisest arguments in vain to those who do not understand reason, just as you would in vain exhibit a curious piece of limning to the blind, or endeavor to bribe, as scripture saith, a sow by the offer of a precious stone. The fault is not, in such case, in the accuracy of your sacred reasoning, but in the obtuseness and perverseness of the barbarians to whom it is applied."

"Speak more plainly," said the Emperor; "how often must we tell thee, that in cases in which we really want counsel, we know we must be contented to sacrifice ceremony?"

"Then in plain words," said Agelastes, "these European barbarians are like no others under the cope of the universe, either on the things on which they look with desire, or on those which they consider as discouraging. The treasures of this noble empire, so far as they affected their wishes, would merely inspire them with the desire to go to war with a nation possessed of so much wealth, and who, in their self-conceited estimation, were less able to defend, than they themselves are powerful to assail. Of such a description, for instance, is Bohemond of Tarentum,—and such a one is many a crusader less able and sagacious than he; for I think I need not tell your Imperial Divinity, that he holds his own self interest to be the devoted guide of his whole conduct through this extraordinary war; and that, therefore, you can justly calculate his course, when once you are aware from which point of the compass the wind of avarice and self-interest breathes with respect to him. But there are

spirits among the Franks of a very different nature, and who must be acted upon by very different motives, if we would make ourselves masters of their actions, and the principles by which they are governed. If it were lawful to do so, I would request your Majesty to look at the manner by which an artful juggler of your court achieves his imposition upon the eyes of spectators, yet heedfully disguises the means by which he attains his object. This people—I mean the more lofty-minded of these crusaders, who act up to the pretences of the doctrine which they call chivalry—despise the thirst of gold, and gold itself, unless to hilt their swords, or to furnish forth some necessary expenses, as alike useless and contemptible. The man who can be moved by the thirst of gain, they condemn, scorn, and despise, and liken him, in the meanness of his objects, to the most paltry serf that ever followed the plough, or wielded the spade. On the other hand, if it happens that they actually need gold, they are sufficiently unceremonious in taking it where they can most easily find it. Thus, they are neither easily to be bribed by giving them sums of gold, nor to be starved into compliance by withholding what chance may render necessary for them. In the one case, they set no value upon the gift of a little paltry yellow dross; in the other, they are accustomed to take what they want."

"Yellow dross!" interrupted Alexius. "Do they call that noble metal, equally respected by Roman and barbarian, by rich and poor, by great and mean, by churchmen and laymen, which all mankind are fighting for, plotting for, planning for, intriguing for, and damning themselves for, both soul and body—by the opprobrious name of yellow dross? They are mad, Agelastes, utterly mad. Perils and dangers, penalties and scourges, are the only arguments to which men who are above the universal influence which moves all others, can possibly be accessible."

"Nor are they," said Agelastes, "more accessible to fear than they are to self-interest. They are, indeed, from their boyhood, brought up to scorn those passions which influence ordinary minds, whether by means of avarice to impel, or of fear to hold back. So much is this the case, that what is enticing to other men, must, to interest them, have the piquant sance of extreme danger. I told, for instance, to this very hero, a legend of a Princess of Zulichium, who lay on an enchanted couch, beautiful as an angel, awaiting the chosen knight who should, by dispelling her enchanted slumbers, become master of her person, of her kingdom of Zulichium, and of her countless treasures; and would your Imperial Majesty believe me, I could scarce get the gallant to attend to my legend or take any interest in the adventure, till I assured him he would have to encounter a winged dragon, compared to which the largest of those in the Frank romances was but like a mere dragon-fly?"

"And did this move the gallant?" said the Emperor.

"So much so," replied the philosopher, "that had I not unfortunately, by the earnestness of my description, awakened the jealousy of his Penthesilea of a Countess, he had forgotten the crusade and all belonging to it, to go in quest of Zulichium and its slumbering sovereign."

"Nay, then," said the Emperor, "we have in our empire (make us sensible of the advantage!) innumerable tale-tellers who are not possessed in the slightest degree of that noble scorn of gold which is proper to the Franks, but shall, for a brace of besants, lie with the devil, and beat him to boot, if in that manner we can gain, as mariners say, the weathergagge of the Franks."

"Discretion," said Agelastes, "is in the highest degree necessary. Simply to lie is no very great matter; it is merely a departure from the truth, which is little different from missing a mark at archery, where the whole horizon, one point alone excepted, will alike serve the shooter's purpose; but to move the Frank as is desired, requires a perfect knowledge of his temper and disposition, great caution and presence of mind, and the most versatile readiness in changing from one subject to another. Had I not myself been somewhat alert, I might have paid the penalty of a false step in your Majesty's service, by being flung into my own cascade by the virago whom I offended."

"A perfect Thalestris!" said the Emperor; "I shall take care what offence I give her."

"If I might speak and live," said Agelastes, "the Cæsar Nicephorus Briennius had best adopt the same precaution."

"Nicephorus," said the Emperor, "must settle that with our daughter. I have ever told her that she gives him too much of that history, of which a page or two is sufficiently refreshing; but by our own self we must swear it, Agelastes, that, night after night, hearing nothing else, would subdue the patience of a saint!—Forget, good Agelastes, that thou hast heard me say such a thing—more especially, remember it not when thou art in presence of our Imperial wife and daughter."

"Nor were the freedoms taken by the Cæsar beyond the bounds of an innocent gallantry," said Agelastes; "but the Countess, I must needs say, is dangerous. She killed this day the Scythian Toxartis, by what seemed a mere filip on the head."

"Hah!" said the Emperor; "I know that Toxartis, and he was like enough to deserve his death, being a bold unscrupulous marauder. Take notes, however, how it happened, the names of witnesses, &c., that, if necessary, we may exhibit the fact as a deed of aggression on the part of the Count and Countess of Paris, to the assembly of the crusaders."

"I trust," said Agelastes, "your Imperial Majesty will not easily resign the golden opportunity of gaining to your standard persons whose character stands so very high in chivalry. It would cost you but little to bestow upon them a

Grecian island, worth a hundred of their own paltry lordship of Paris; and if it were given under the condition of their expelling the infidels or the disaffected who may have obtained the temporary possession, it would be so much the more likely to be an acceptable offer. I need not say that the whole knowledge, wisdom, and skill of the poor Agelastes is at your Imperial Majesty's disposal."

The Emperor paused for a moment, and then said, as if on full consideration, "Worthy Agelastes, I dare trust thee in this difficult and somewhat dangerous matter; but I will keep my purpose of exhibiting to them the Lions of Solomon, and the golden tree of our Imperial house."

"To that there can be no objection," returned the philosopher; "only remember to exhibit few guards, for these Franks are like a fiery horse; when in temper he may be ridden with a silk thread, but when he has taken umbrage or suspicion, as they would likely do if they saw many armed men, a steel bridle would not restrain him."

"I will be cautious," said the Emperor, "in that particular, as well as others.—Sound the silver bell, Agelastes, that the officers of our wardrobe may attend."

"One single word, while your Highness is alone," said Agelastes. "Will your Imperial Majesty transfer to me the direction of your menagerie, or collection of extraordinary creatures?"

"You make me wonder," said the Emperor, taking a signet, bearing upon it a lion, with the legend *Vicisti Leo ex tribu Juda*. "This," he said, "will give thee the command of our dens. And now, be candid for once with thy master—for deception is thy nature even with me—By what charm wilt thou subdue these untamed savages?"

"By the power of falsehood," replied Agelastes, with deep reverence.

"I believe thee an adept in it," said the Emperor. "And to which of their foibles wilt thou address it?"

"To their love of fame," said the philosopher; and retreated backwards out of the royal apartment, as the officers of the wardrobe entered to complete the investment of the Emperor in his Imperial habiliments.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

I will converse with iron-witted fools  
And unrespective boys; none are for me,  
That look into me with considerate eyes;—  
High-reaching Buckingham grows circumspect.

RICHARD III.

As they parted from each other, the Emperor and philosopher had each their own anxious thoughts on the interview which had passed between them; thoughts which they expressed in broken sentences and ejaculations, though for the better understanding of the degree of estimation

in which they held each other, we will give them a more regular and intelligible form.

"Thus, then," half-muttered half-said Alexius, but so low as to hide his meaning from the officers of the wardrobe, who entered to do their office,—“thus, then, this bookworm—this remnant of old heathen philosophy, who hardly believes, so God save me, the truth of the Christian creed, has topped his part so well that he forces his Emperor to dissemble in his presence. Beginning by being the buffoon of the court, he has wormed himself into all its secrets, made himself master of all its intrigues, conspired with my own son-in-law against me, debauched my guards,—indeed so woven his web of deceit, that my life is safe no longer than he believes me the imperial dolt which I have affected to seem, in order to deceive him; fortunate that even so I can escape his cautionary anticipation of my displeasure, by avoiding to precipitate his measures of violence. But were this sudden storm of the crusade fairly passed over, the ungrateful Cæsar, the boastful coward Achilles Tatius, and the bosom serpent Agelastes, shall know whether Alexius Comnenus has been born their dupe. When Greek meets Greek, comes the strife of subtlety, as well as the tug of war.” Thus saying, he resigned himself to the officers of his wardrobe, who proceeded to ornament him as the solemnity required.

"I trust him not," said Agelastes, the meaning of whose gestures and exclamations, we, in like manner, render into a connected meaning. "I cannot, and do not trust him—he somewhat overacts his part. He has borne himself upon other occasions with the shrewd wit of his family the Comneni; yet he now trusts to the effect of his trumpety lions upon such a shrewd people as the Franks and Normans, and seems to rely upon me for the character of men with whom he has been engaged in peace and war for many years. This can be but to gain my confidence; for there were imperfect looks, and broken sentences, which seemed to say, 'Agelastes, the Emperor knows thee, and confides not in thee.' Yet the plot is successful and undiscovered, as far as can be judged; and were I to attempt to recede now, I were lost for ever. A little time to carry on this intrigue with the Frank, when possibly, by the assistance of this gallant, Alexius shall exchange the crown for a cloister, or a still narrower abode; and then, Agelastes, thou deservest to be blotted from the roll of philosophers, if thou canst not push out of the throne the conceited and luxurious Cæsar, and reign in his stead, a second Marcus Antoninus, when the wisdom of thy rule, long unfelt in a world which has been gulped by tyrants and voluptuaries, shall soon obliterate recollection of the manner in which thy power was acquired. To work then—be active, and be cautious. The time requires it, and the prize deserves it."

While these thoughts passed through his mind, he arrayed himself, by the assistance of

Diogenes, in a clean suit of that simple apparel in which he always frequented the court; a garb as unlike that of a candidate for royalty, as it was a contrast to the magnificent robes with which Alexius was now investing himself.

In their separate apartments, or dressing-rooms, the Count of Paris and his lady put on the best apparel which they had prepared to meet such a chance upon their journey. Even in France, Robert was seldom seen in the peaceful cap and sweeping mantle, whose high plumes and flowing folds were the garb of knights in time of peace. He was now arrayed in a splendid suit of armor, all except the head, which was bare otherwise than as covered by his curled locks. The rest of his person was sheathed in the complete mail of the time, richly inlaid with silver, which contrasted with the azure in which the steel was damasked. His spurs were upon his heels—his sword was by his side, and his triangular shield was suspended round his neck, bearing, painted upon it, a number of *feurs-de-lis semés*, as it is called, upon the field, being the origin of those lily flowers which after-times reduced to three only; and which were the terror of Europe, until they suffered so many reverses in our own time.

The extreme height of Count Robert's person adapted him for a garb, which had a tendency to make persons of a lower stature appear rather dwarfish and thick when arrayed *cap-à-pie*. The features, with their self-collected composure, and noble contempt of whatever could have astounded or shaken an ordinary mind, formed a well-fitted capital to the excellently proportioned and vigorous frame which they terminated. The Countess was in more peaceful attire; but her robes were short and succinct, like those of one who might be called to hasty exercise. The upper part of her dress consisted of more than one tunic, sitting close to the body, while a skirt, descending from the girdle, and reaching to the ankles, embroidered elegantly but richly, completed an attire which a lady might have worn in much more modern times. Her tresses were covered with a light steel head-piece, though some of them, escaping, played round her face, and gave relief to those handsome features which might otherwise have seemed too formal, if closed entirely within the verge of steel. Over these under-garments was flung a rich velvet cloak of a deep-green color, descending from the head, where a species of hood was loosely adjusted over the helmet, deeply laced upon its verges and seams, and so long as to sweep the ground behind. A dagger of rich materials ornamented a girdle of curious goldsmith's work, and was the only offensive weapon which, notwithstanding her military occupation, she bore upon this occasion.

The toilet—as modern times would say—of the Countess, was not nearly so soon ended as that of Count Robert, who occupied his time, as husbands of every period are apt to do, in little

sub-acid complaints between jest and earnest, upon the dilatory nature of ladies, and the time which they lose in doffing and donning their garments. But when the Countess Brenhilda came forth in the pride of loveliness, from the inner chamber where she had attired herself, her husband, who was still her lover, clasped her to his breast, and expressed his privilege by the kiss which he took as of right from a creature so beautiful. Chiding him for his folly, yet almost returning the kiss which she received, Brenhilda began now to wonder how they were to find their way to the presence of the Emperor.

The query was soon solved, for a gentle knock at the door announced Agelastes, to whom, as best acquainted with the Frankish manners, had been committed, by the Emperor, the charge of introducing the noble strangers. A distant sound, like that of the roaring of a lion, or not unsimilar to a large and deep gong of modern times, intimated the commencement of the ceremonial. The black slaves upon guard, who, as hath been observed, were in small numbers, stood ranged in their state dresses of white and gold, bearing in one hand a naked sabre, and in the other a torch of white wax, which served to guide the Count and Countess through the passages that led to the interior of the palace, and to the most secret hall of audience.

The door of this *sanctum sanctorum* was lower than usual, a simple stratagem devised by some superstitious officer of the Imperial household, to compel the lofty-crested Frank to lower his body, as he presented himself in the Imperial presence. Robert, when the door flew open, and he discovered in the background the Emperor seated upon his throne amidst a glare of light, which was broken and reflected in ten thousand folds by the jewels with which his vestments were covered, stopped short, and demanded the meaning of introducing him through so low an arch? Agelastes pointed to the Emperor by way of shifting from himself a question which he could not have answered. The mute, to apologize for his silence, yawned, and showed the loss of his tongue.

"Holy Virgin!" said the Countess, "what can these unhappy Africans have done, to have deserved a condemnation which involves so cruel a fate?"

"The hour of retribution is perhaps come," said the Count, in a displeased tone, while Agelastes, with such hurry as time and place permitted, entered, making his prostrations and genuflections, little doubting that the Frank must follow him, and to do so must lower his body to the Emperor. The Count, however, in the height of displeasure at the trick which he conceived had been intended him, turned himself round, and entered the presence-chamber with his back purposely turned to the sovereign, and did not face Alexius until he reached the middle of the apartment, when he was joined by the Countess, who had made her approach in a