

held him forcibly down with his face to the earth.

Count Robert was one of the strongest men of that military age; but then so was the Varangian; and save that the latter had obtained a decided advantage by having his antagonist beneath him, it could not certainly have been conjectured which way the combat was to go.

"Yield! as your own jargon goes, rescue or no rescue," said the Varangian, "or die on the point of my dagger!"

"A French Count never yields," answered Robert, who began to conjecture with what sort of person he was engaged, "above all to a vagabond slave like thee!" With this he made an effort to rise, so sudden, so strong, so powerful, that he had almost freed himself from the Varangian's grasp, had not Hereward, by a violent exertion of his great strength, preserved the advantage he had gained, and raised his poniard to end the strife for ever; but a loud chuckling laugh of an unearthly sound was at this instant heard. The Varangian's extended arm was seized with vigor, while a rough arm embracing his throat, turned him over on his back, and gave the French Count an opportunity of springing up.

"Death to thee, wretch!" said the Varangian, scarce knowing whom he threatened; but the man of the woods apparently had an awful recollection of the prowess of human beings. He fled, therefore, swiftly up the ladder, and left Hereward and his deliverer to fight it out with what success chance might determine between them.

The circumstances seemed to argue a desperate combat; both were tall, strong, and courageous, both had defensive armor, and the fatal and desperate poniard was their only offensive weapon. They paused facing each other, and examined eagerly into their respective means of defence before hazarding a blow, which, if it missed, its attainment would certainly be fatally requited. During this deadly pause, a gleam shone from the trap-door above, as the wild and alarmed visage of the man of the woods was seen peering down by the light of a newly kindled torch which he held as low into the dungeon as he well could.

"Fight bravely, comrade," said Count Robert of Paris, "for we no longer battle in private; this respectable person having chosen to constitute himself judge of the field."

Hazardous as his situation was, the Varangian looked up, and was so struck with the wild and terrified expression which the creature had assumed, and the strife between curiosity and terror which its grotesque features exhibited, that he could not help bursting into a fit of laughter.

"Sylvan is among those," said Hereward, who would rather hold the candle to a dance so formidable than join in it himself."

"Is there then," said Count Robert, "any

absolute necessity that thou and I perform this dance at all?"

"None but our own pleasure," answered Hereward; "for I suspect there is not between us any legitimate cause of quarrel demanding to be fought out in such a place, and before such a spectator. Thou art, if I mistake not, the bold Frank, who was yesternight imprisoned in this place with a tiger, chained within no distant spring of his bed?"

"I am," answered the Count.

"And where is the animal who was opposed to thee?"

"He lies yonder," answered the Count, "never again to be the object of more terror than the deer whom he may have preyed on in his day." He pointed to the body of the tiger, which Hereward examined by the light of the dark lantern already mentioned.

"And this, then, was thy handiwork?" said the wondering Anglo-Saxon.

"Sooth to say it was," answered the Count, with indifference.

"And thou hast slain my comrade of this strange watch?" said the Varangian.

"Mortally wounded him at the least," said Count Robert.

"With your patience, I will be beholden to you for a moment's truce, while I examine his wound," said Hereward.

"Assuredly," answered the Count; "blighted be the arm which strikes a foul blow at an open antagonist!"

Without demanding further security, the Varangian quitted his posture of defence and precaution, and set himself, by the assistance of the dark lantern, to examine the wound of the first warder who appeared on the field, who seemed, by his Roman military dress, to be a soldier of the bands called Immortals. He found him in the death-agony, but still able to speak.

"So, Varangian, thou art come at last,—and is it to thy sloth or treachery that I am to impute my fate?—Nay, answer me not!—The stranger struck me over the collar-bone—had we lived long together, or met often, I had done the like by thee, to wipe out the memory of certain transactions at the Golden Gate.—I know the use of the knife too well to doubt the effect of a blow aimed over the collar-bone by so strong a hand—I feel it coming. The Immortal, so called, be comes now, if priests say true, an immortal indeed, and Sebastes of Mytilene's bow is broken ere his quiver is half emptied."

The robber Greek sunk back in Hereward's arms, and closed his life with a groan, which was the last sound he uttered. The Varangian laid the body at length on the dungeon floor.

"This is a perplexed matter," he said; "I am certainly not called upon to put to death a brave man, although my national enemy, because he hath killed a miscreant who was privately meditating my own murder. Neither is this a place or a light by which to fight as becomes the

champions of two nations. Let that quarrel be still for the present.—How say you then, noble sir, if we adjourn the present dispute till we effect your deliverance from the dungeons of the Blacquernal, and your restoration to your own friends and followers? If a poor Varangian should be of service to you in this matter, would you, when it was settled, refuse to meet him in fair fight, with your national weapons or his own?"

"If," said Count Robert, "whether friend or enemy, thou wilt extend thy assistance to my wife, who is also imprisoned somewhere in this inhospitable palace, be assured, that whatever be thy rank, whatever be thy country, whatever be thy condition, Robert of Paris will, at thy choice, proffer thee his right hand in friendship, or raise it against thee in fair and manly battle—a strife not of hatred, but of honor and esteem; and this I vow by the soul of Charlemagne, my ancestor, and by the shrine of my patroness, Our Lady of the Broken Lances."

"Enough said," replied Hereward, "I am as much bound to the assistance of your Lady Countess, being a poor exile, as if I were the first in the ranks of chivalry; for if any thing can make the cause of worth and bravery yet more obligatory, it must be its being united with that of a helpless and suffering female."

"I ought," said Count Robert, "to be here silent, without loading thy generosity with farther requests; yet thou art a man, whom, if fortune has not smiled at thy birth, by ordaining thee to be born within the ranks of noblesse and knighthood, yet Providence hath done thee more justice by giving thee a more gallant heart than is always possessed, I fear, by those who are involved in the gayest wreath of chivalry. There lingers here in these dungeons, for I cannot say he lives—a blind old man, to whom for three years every thing beyond his prison has been a universal blot. His food is bread and water, his intercourse limited to the conversation of a sullen warder, and if death can ever come as a deliverer, it must be to this dark old man. What sayst thou? Shall he, so unutterably miserable, not profit by perhaps the only opportunity of freedom that may ever occur to him?"

"By St. Dunstan," answered the Varangian, "thou keepest over truly the oath thou hast taken as a redresser of wrongs! Thine own case is well-nigh desperate, and thou art willing to make it utterly so by uniting with it that of every unhappy person whom fate throws in thy way!"

"The more of human misery we attempt to relieve," said Robert of Paris, "the more we shall carry with us the blessing of our merciful saints, and Our Lady of the Broken Lances, who views with so much pain every species of human suffering or misfortune, save that which occurs within the enclosure of the lists. But come, valiant Anglo-Saxon, resolve me on my request as speedily as thou canst. There is something in thy face of candor as well as sense, and it is with

no small confidence that I desire to see us set forth in quest of my beloved Countess, who, when her deliverance is once achieved, will be a powerful aid to us in recovering that of others."

"So be it, then," said the Varangian; "we will proceed in quest of the Countess Brehilda; and if, on recovering her, we find ourselves strong enough to procure the freedom of the dark old man, my cowardice, or want of compassion, shall never stop the attempt."

CHAPTER XVII.

'Tis strange that, in the dark sulphureous mine,
Where wild ambition piles its ripening stores
Of slumbering thunder, Love will interpose
His tiny torch, and cause the stern explosion
To burst, when the deviser's least aware.

ANONYMOUS.

ABOUT noon of the same day, Agelastes met with Achilles Tatius, the commander of the Varangian guard, in those ruins of the Egyptian temple, in which we formerly mentioned Hereward having had an interview with the philosopher. They met, as it seemed, in a very different humor. Tatius was gloomy, melancholy, and downcast; while the philosopher maintained the calm indifference which procured for him, and in some sort deserved, the title of the Elephant. "Thou blindest, Achilles Tatius," said the philosopher, "now that thou hast frankly opposed thyself to all the dangers which stood between thee and greatness. Thou art like the idle boy who turned the mill-stream upon the machine, and that done, instead of making a proper use of it, was terrified at seeing it in motion."

"Thou dost me wrong, Agelastes," answered the Acolyte, "foul wrong; I am but like the mariner, who although determined upon his voyage, yet cannot forbear a sorrowing glance at the shore, before he parts with it, it may be, for ever."

"It may have been right to think of this, but pardon me, valiant Tatius, when I tell you the account should have been made up before; and the grandson of Algoric the Hun ought to have computed chances and consequences ere he stretched his hand to his master's diadem."

"Hush! for Heaven's sake," said Tatius, looking round; "that, thou knowest, is a secret between our two selves; for if Nicophorus, the Cæsar, should learn it, where were we and our conspiracy?"

"Our bodies on the gibbet, probably," answered Agelastes, "and our souls divorced from them, and in the way of discovering the secrets which thou hast hitherto taken upon trust."

"Well," said Achilles, "and should not the consciousness of the possibility of this fate render us cautious?"

"Cautious men, if you will," answered Agelastes, "but not timid children."

"Stone walls can hear,"—said the Follower, lowering his voice. "Dionysius the tyrant, I

have read, had an Ear which conveyed to him the secrets spoken within his state-prison at Syracuse."

"And that Ear is still stationary at Syracuse," said the philosopher. "Tell me, my most simple friend, art thou afraid it has been transported hither in one night, as the Latins believe of Our Lady's house of Loretto?"

"No," answered Achilles, "but in an affair so important too much caution cannot be used."

"Well, thou most cautious of candidates for empire, and most cold of military leaders, know that the Cæsar, deeming, I think, that there is no chance of the empire falling to any one but himself, hath taken in his head to consider his succession to Alexius as a matter of course, whenever the election takes place. In consequence, as matters of course are usually matters of indifference, he has left all thoughts of securing his interest upon this material occasion to thee and to me, while the foolish voluptuary hath himself run mad—for what think you? Something between man and woman—female in her lineaments, her limbs, and a part at least of her garments; but, so help me, St. George, most masculine in the rest of her attire, in her propensities, and in her exercises."

"The Amazonian wife, thou meanest," said Achilles, "of that iron-handed Frank, who dashed to pieces last night the golden lion of Solomon with a blow of his fist? By St. George, the least which can come of such an amour is broken bones."

"That," said Agelastes, "is not quite so improbable as that Dionysius's Ear should fly hither from Syracuse in a single night; but he is presumptuous in respect of the influence which his supposed good looks have gained him among the Grecian dames."

"He was too presumptuous, I suppose," said Achilles Tatius, "to make a proper allowance for his situation as Cæsar, and the prospect of his being Emperor."

"Meantime," said Agelastes, "I have promised him an interview with his Bradamante, who may perhaps reward his tender epithets of *Zoe kai psyche*,* by divorcing his amorous soul from his unrivalled person."

"Meantime," said the Follower, "thou obtainest, I conclude, such orders and warrants as the Cæsar can give for the furtherance of our plot?"

"Assuredly," said Agelastes, "it is an opportunity not to be lost. This love fit, or mad fit, has blinded him; and without exciting too much attention to the progress of the plot, we can thus in safety conduct matters our own way, without causing malevolent remarks; and though I am conscious that, in doing so, I act somewhat at variance with my age and character, yet the end being to convert a worthy Follower into an Imperial Leader, I shame me not in procuring that

* "Life and Soul."

interview with the lady, of which the Cæsar, as they term him, is so desirous.—What progress, meanwhile, hast thou made with the Varangians, who are, in respect of execution, the very arm of our design?"

"Scarce so good as I could wish," said Achilles Tatius; "yet I have made sure of some two or three score of those whom I found most accessible; nor have I any doubt that, when the Cæsar is set aside, their cry will be for Achilles Tatius."

"And what of the gallant who assisted at our prelections?" said Agelastes; "your Edward, as Alexius termed him?"

"I have made no impression upon him," said the Follower; "and I am sorry for it, for he is one whom his comrades think well of, and would gladly follow. Meantime I have placed him as an additional sentinel upon the iron-witted Count of Paris, whom, both having an inveterate love of battle, he is very likely to put to death; and if it is afterwards challenged by the crusaders as a cause of war, it is only delivering up the Varangian, whose personal hatred will needs be represented as having occasioned the catastrophe. All this being prepared beforehand, how and when shall we deal with the Emperor?"

"For that," said Agelastes, "we must consult the Cæsar, who, although his expected happiness of to-day is not more certain than the state preferment that he expects to-morrow, and although his ideas are much more anxiously fixed upon his success with this said Countess than his succession to the empire, will, nevertheless, expect to be treated as the head of the enterprise for accelerating the latter. But, to speak my opinion, valiant Tatius, to-morrow will be the last day that Alexius shall hold the reins of empire."

"Let me know for certain," said the Follower, "as soon as thou canst, that I may warn our brethren, who are to have in readiness the insurgent citizens, and those of the Immortals who are combined with us, in the neighborhood of the court, and in readiness to act—and, above all, that I may disperse upon distant guards such Varangians as I cannot trust."

"Rely upon me," said Agelastes, "for the most accurate information and instructions, so soon as I have seen Nicephorus Briennius. One word permit me to ask—in what manner is the wife of the Cæsar to be disposed of?"

"Somewhere," said the Follower, "where I can never be compelled to hear more of her history. Were it not for that nightly pest of her lectures, I could be good-natured enough to take care of her destiny myself, and teach her the difference betwixt a real emperor and this Briennius, who thinks so much of himself." So saying, they separated; the Follower elated in look and manner considerably above what he had been when they met.

Agelastes looked after his companion with a scornful laugh. "There," he said, "goes a fool

whose lack of sense prevents his eyes from being dazzled by the torch which cannot fail to consume him. A half-bred, half-acting, half-thinking, half-daring catfif, whose poorest thoughts—and those which deserve that name must be poor indeed—are not the produce of his own understanding. He expects to circumvent the fiery, haughty, and proud Nicephorus Briennius! If he does so, it will not be by his own policy, and still less by his valor. Nor shall Anna Comnena, the soul of wit and genius, be chained to such an unimaginative log as yonder half-barbarian. No—she shall have a husband of pure Grecian extraction, and well stored with that learning which was studied when Rome was great, and Greece illustrious. Nor will it be the least charm of the Imperial throne, that it is partaken by a partner whose personal studies have taught her to esteem and value those of the Emperor. He took a step or two with conscious elevation, and then, as conscience-checked, he added, in a suppressed voice, "But then, if Anna were destined for Empress, it follows of course that Alexius must die—no consent could be trusted to.—And what then?—the death of an ordinary man is indifferent, when it plants on the throne a philosopher and a historian; and at what time were the possessors of the empire curious to inquire when or by whose agency their predecessors died?—Diogenes! Ho, Diogenes!" The slave did not immediately come, so that Agelastes, wrapt in the anticipation of his greatness, had time to add a few more words—"Tush—I must reckon with Heaven, say the priests, for many things, so I will throw this also into the account. The death of the Emperor may be twenty ways achieved without my having the blame of it. The blood which we have shed may spot our hand, if closely regarded, but it shall scarce stain our forehead." Diogenes here entered.—"Has the Frank lady been removed?" said the philosopher.

The slave signified his assent.

"How did she bear her removal?"

"As authorized by your lordship, indifferently well. She had resented her separation from her husband, and her being detained in the palace, and committed some violence upon the slaves of the Household, several of whom were said to be slain, although we perhaps ought only to read sorely frightened. She recognised me at once, and when I told her that I came to offer her a day's retirement in your own lodgings, until it should be in your power to achieve the liberation of her husband, she at once consented, and I deposited her in the secret Cytherean garden-house."

"Admirably done, my faithful Diogenes," said the philosopher; "thou art like the genii who attended on the Eastern talismans; I have but to intimate my will to thee, and it is accomplished."

Diogenes bowed deeply, and withdrew.

"Yet remember, slave!" said Agelastes,

speaking to himself; "there is danger in knowing too much—and should my character ever become questioned, too many of my secrets are in the power of Diogenes."

At this moment a blow thrice repeated, and struck upon one of the images without, which had been so framed as to return a tingling sound, and in so far deserved the praise of being vocal, interrupted his soliloquy.

"There knocks," said he, "one of our allies; who can it be that comes so late?" He touched the figure of Isis with his staff, and the Cæsar Nicephorus Briennius entered in the full Grecian habit, and that graceful dress anxiously arranged to the best advantage. "Let me hope, my lord," said Agelastes, receiving the Cæsar with an apparently grave and reserved face, "your Highness comes to tell me that your sentiments are changed on reflection, and that whatever you had to confer about with this Frankish lady, may be at least deferred until the principal part of our conspiracy has been successfully executed."

"Philosopher," answered the Cæsar, "no. My resolution, once taken, is not the sport of circumstances. Believe me, that I have not finished so many labors without being ready to undertake others. The favor of Venus is the reward of the labors of Mars; nor would I think it worth while to worship the god omnipotent with the toil and risk attending his service, unless I had previously attained some decided proofs that I was wreathed with the myrtle, intimating the favor of his beautiful mistress."

"I beg pardon for my boldness," said Agelastes; "but has your Imperial Highness reflected, that you were wagering, with the wildest rashness, an empire, including thine own life, mine, and all who are joined with us in a hardy scheme? And against what were they waged? Against the very precarious favor of a woman, who is altogether divided betwixt fiend and female, and in either capacity is most likely to be fatal to our present scheme, either by her good will, or by the offence which she may take. If she prove such as you wish, she will desire to keep her lover by her side, and to spare him the danger of engaging in a perilous conspiracy; and if she remains, as the world believe her, constant to her husband, and to the sentiments she vowed to him at the altar, you may guess what cause of offence you are likely to give, by urging a suit which she has already received so very ill."

"Pshaw, old man! Thou turnest a dotard, and in the great knowledge thou possessest of other things, hast forgotten the knowledge best worth knowing—that of the beautiful part of the creation. Think of the impression likely to be made by a gallant neither ignoble in situation, nor unacceptable in presence, upon a lady who must fear the consequences of refusal! Come, Agelastes, let me have no more of thy croaking, auguring bad fortune like the raven from the blasted oak on the left hand: but declaim, as

well thou canst, how faint heart never won fair lady, and how those best deserve empire who can wreath the myrtles of Venus with the laurels of Mars. Come, man, undo me the secret entrance which combines these magical ruins with groves that are fashioned rather like those of Cytheros or Naxos."

"It must be as you will!" said the philosopher, with a deep and somewhat affected sigh.

"Here, Diogenes!" called aloud the Cæsar; "when thou art summoned, mischief is not far distant. Come, undo the secret entrance. Mischief, my trusty negro, is not so distant but she will answer the first clatter of the stones."

The negro looked at his master, who returned him a glance acquiescing in the Cæsar's proposal. Diogenes then went to a part of the ruined wall which was covered by some climbing shrubs, all of which he carefully removed. This showed a little postern door, closed irregularly, and filled up, from the threshold to the top, with large square stones, all of which the slave took out and piled aside, as if for the purpose of replacing them. "I leave thee," said Agelastes to the negro, "to guard this door, and let no one enter, except he has the sign, upon the peril of thy life. It were dangerous it should be left open at this period of the day."

The obsequious Diogenes put his hand to his sabre and to his head, as if to signify the usual promise of fidelity or death, by which those of his condition generally expressed their answer to their master's commands. Diogenes then lighted a small lantern, and pulling out a key, opened an inner door of wood, and prepared to step forward.

"Hold, friend Diogenes," said the Cæsar; "thou wantest not my lantern to discern an honest man whom, if thou didst seek, I must needs say thou hast come to the wrong place to find one. Nail thou up these creeping shrubs before the entrance of the place, and abide thou there as already directed, till our return, to parry the curiosity of any who may be attracted by the sight of the private passage."

The black slave drew back as he gave the lamp to the Cæsar, and Agelastes followed the light through a long, but narrow, arched passage, well supplied with air from space to space, and not neglected in the inside to the degree which its exterior would have implied.

"I will not enter with you into the gardens," said Agelastes, "or to the bower of Cytherea, where I am too old to be a worshipper. Thou thyself, I think, Imperial Cæsar, art well aware of the road, having travelled it divers times; and, if I mistake not, for the fairest reasons."

"The more thanks," said the Cæsar, "are due to mine excellent friend Agelastes, who forgets his own age to accommodate the youth of his friends."

CHAPTER XVIII.

WE must now return to the dungeon of the Blacquernal, where circumstances had formed at least a temporary union between the stout Varangian and Count Robert of Paris, who had a stronger resemblance to each other in their dispositions than probably either of them would have been willing to admit. The virtues of the Varangian were all of that natural and unrefined kind which Nature herself dictates to a gallant man, to whom a total want of fear, and the most prompt alacrity to meet danger, had been attributes of a life-long standing. The Count, on the other hand, had all that bravery, generosity, and love of adventure, which was possessed by the rude soldier, with the virtues partly real, partly fantastic, which those of his rank and country acquired from the spirit of chivalry. The one might be compared to the diamond as it came from the mine, before it had yet received the advantages of cutting and setting; the other was the ornamented gem, which, cut into facets and richly set, had lost perhaps a little of its original substance, yet still, at the same time, to the eye of an inspector, had something more showy and splendid than when it was, according to the phrase of lapidaries, *en brut*. In the one case, the value was more artificial; in the other, it was the more natural and real of the two. Chance, therefore, had made a temporary alliance between two men, the foundation of whose characters bore such strong resemblance to each other, that they were only separated by a course of education, which had left rigid prejudices on both sides, and which prejudices were not unlikely to run counter to each other. The Varangian commenced his conversation with the Count in a tone of familiarity, approaching nearer to rudeness than the speaker was aware of, and much of which, though most innocently intended by Hereward, might be taken amiss by his new brother in arms. The most offensive part of his deportment, however, was a blunt, bold disregard to the title of those whom he addressed, adhering thereby to the manners of the Saxons, from whom he drew his descent, and which was likely to be at least displeasing to the Franks as well as Normans, who had already received and become very tenacious of the privileges of the feudal system, the mummery of heraldry, and the warlike claims assumed by knights, as belonging only to their own order.

Hereward was apt, it must be owned, to think too little of these distinctions; while he had at least a sufficient tendency to think enough of the power and wealth of the Greek empire which he served,—of the dignity inherent in Alexius Comnenus, and which he was also disposed to grant to the Grecian officers, who, under the Emperor, commanded his own corps, and particularly to Achilles Tatius. This man, Hereward knew to be a coward, and half-suspected to be a villain. Still, however, the Follower was always the direct channel through which the Imperial graces

were conferred on the Varangians in general as well as upon Hereward himself; and he had always the policy to represent such favors as being more or less indirectly the consequence of his own intercession. He was supposed vigorously to espouse the quarrel of the Varangians, in all the disputes between them and the other corps; he was liberal and open-handed; gave every soldier his due; and, bating the trifling circumstance of valor, which was not particularly his forte, it would have been difficult for these strangers to have demanded a leader more to their wishes. Besides this, our friend Hereward was admitted by him into his society, attended him, as we have seen, upon secret expeditions, and shared, therefore, deeply, in what may be termed by an expressive, though vulgar phrase, the sneaking kindness entertained for this new Achilles by the greater part of his myrmidons.

Their attachment might be explained, perhaps, as a liking to their commander, as strong as could well exist with a marvellous lack of honor and esteem. The scheme, therefore, formed by Hereward to effect the deliverance of the Count of Paris, comprehended as much faith to the Emperor, and his representative, the Acolyte or Follower, as was consistent with rendering justice to the injured Frank.

In furtherance of this plan, he conducted Count Robert from the subterranean vaults of the Blacquernal, of the intricacies of which he was master, having been repeatedly, of late, stationed sentinel there, for the purpose of acquiring that knowledge of which Tatius promised himself the advantage in the ensuing conspiracy. When they were in the open air, and at some distance from the gloomy towers of the Palace, he bluntly asked the Count of Paris whether he knew Agelastes the Philosopher. The other answered in the negative.

"Look you now, Sir Knight, you hurt yourself in attempting to impose upon me," said Hereward. "You must know him; for I saw you dined with him yesterday."

"O! with that learned old man?" said the Count. "I know nothing of him worth owning or disguising to thee or any one. A wily person he is, half herald and half minstrel."

"Half procurer and whole knave," subjoined the Varangian. "With the mask of apparent good-humor he conceals his pandering to the vices of others; with the specious jargon of philosophy, he has argued himself out of religious belief and moral principle; and, with the appearance of the most devoted loyalty, he will, if he is not checked in time, either argue his too confiding master out of life and empire, or, if he fails in this, reason his simple associates into death and misery."

"And do you know all this," said Count Robert, "and permit this man to go unimpeached?"

"O, content you, sir," replied the Varangian;

"I cannot yet form any plot which Agelastes may not countermine; but the time will come, nay it is already approaching, when the Emperor's attention shall be irresistibly turned to the conduct of this man, and then let the philosopher sit fast, or by St. Dunstan the barbarian overthrows him! I would only fain, methinks, save from his clutches a foolish friend, who has listened to his delusions."

"But what have I to do," said the Count, "with this man, or with his plots?"

"Much," said Hereward, "although you know it not. The main supporter of this plot is no other than the Cæsar, who ought to be the most faithful of men; but ever since Alexius has named a Sebastocrator, an officer that is higher in rank, and nearer to the throne than the Cæsar himself, so long has Nicephorus Briennius been displeased and dissatisfied, though for what length of time he has joined the schemes of the astucious Agelastes it is more difficult to say. This I know, that for many months he has fed liberally, as his riches enable him to do, the vices and prodigality of the Cæsar. He has encouraged him to show disrespect to his wife, although the Emperor's daughter; has put ill-will between him and the royal family. And if Briennius bears no longer the fame of a rational man, and the renown of a good leader, he is deprived of both by following the advice of this artful sycophant."

"And what is all this to me?" said the Frank. "Agelastes may be a true man or a time-serving slave; his master, Alexius Comnenus, is not so much allied to me or mine that I should meddle in the intrigues of his court."

"You may be mistaken in that," said the blunt Varangian; "if these intrigues involve the happiness and virtue—"

"Death of a thousand martyrs!" said the Frank, "do paltry intrigues and quarrels of slaves involve a single thought of suspicion of the noble Countess of Paris? The oaths of thy whole generation were ineffectual to prove but that one of her hairs had changed its color to silver!"

"Well imagined, gallant knight," said the Anglo-Saxon; "thou art a husband fitted for the atmosphere of Constantinople, which calls for little vigilance and a strong belief. Thou wilt find many followers and fellows in this court of ours."

"Hark thee, friend," replied the Frank, "let us have no more words, nor walk farther together than just to the most solitary nook of this bewildered city, and let us there set to that work which we left even now unfinished."

"If thou wert a Duke, Sir Count," replied the Varangian, "thou couldst not invite to a combat one who is more ready for it. Yet consider the odds on which we fight. If I fail, my moan is soon made; but will my death set thy wife at liberty if she is under restraint, or restore her honor if it is tarnished?—Will it do any thing