

of Epicurus would choose for themselves, was what they assigned for those gods whose being they admitted. Others, more bold or more consistent, entirely denied the existence of deities who apparently had no proper object or purpose, and believed that such of them, whose being and attributes were proved to us by no supernatural appearances, had in reality no existence whatever."

"Stop, wretch!" said the Countess, "and know that thou speakest not to one of those blinded heathens, of whose abominable doctrines you are detailing the result. Know, that if an erring, I am nevertheless a sincere daughter of the Church, and this cross displayed on my shoulder, is a sufficient emblem of the vows I have undertaken in its cause. Be therefore wary, as thou art wily; for, believe me, if thou scoffest or utterest reproach against my holy religion, what I am unable to answer in language, I will reply to, without hesitation, with the point of my dagger."

"To that argument," said Agelastes, drawing back from the neighborhood of Brenhilda, "believe me, fair lady, I am very unwilling to urge your gentleness. But although I shall not venture to say any thing of those superior and benevolent powers to whom you ascribe the management of the world, you will surely not take offence at my noticing those base superstitions which have been adopted in explanation of what is called by the Magi, the Evil Principle. Was there ever received into a human creed, a being so mean—almost so ridiculous—as the Christian Satan? A goatish figure and limbs, with grotesque features, formed to express the most execrable passions; a degree of power scarce inferior to that of the Deity; and a talent at the same time scarce equal to that of the stupidest of the lowest order! What is he, this being, who is at least the second arbiter of the human race, save an immortal spirit, with the petty spleen and spite of a vindictive old man or old woman?"

Agelastes made a singular pause in this part of his discourse. A mirror of considerable size hung in the apartment, so that the philosopher could see in its reflection the figure of Brenhilda, and remark the change of her countenance, though she had averted her face from him in hatred of the doctrines which he promulgated. On this glass the philosopher had his eyes naturally fixed, and he was confounded at perceiving a figure glide from behind the shadow of a curtain, and glare at him with the supposed mien and expression of the Satan of monkish mythology, or a satyr of the heathen age.

"Man!" said Brenhilda, whose attention was attracted by this extraordinary apparition, as it seemed, of the fiend, "have thy wicked words, and still more wicked thoughts, brought the devil amongst us? If so, dismiss him instantly, else, by our Lady of the Broken Lances! thou shalt know better than at present, what is the temper of a Frankish maiden, when in presence of the

fiend himself, and those who pretend skill to raise him! I wish not to enter into a contest unless compelled; but if I am obliged to join battle with an enemy so horrible, believe me, no one shall say that Brenhilda feared him."

Agelastes, after looking with surprise and horror at the figure as reflected in the glass, turned back his head to examine the substance, of which the reflection was so strange. The object, however, had disappeared behind the curtain, under which it probably lay hid, and it was after a minute or two that the half-gibing, half-scowling countenance showed itself again in the same position in the mirror.

"By the gods!" said Agelastes—

"In whom but now," said the countess, "you professed unbelief."

"By the gods!" repeated Agelastes, in part recovering himself, "it is Sylvan! that singular mockery of humanity, who was said to have been brought from Taprobana. I warrant he also believes in his jolly god Pan, or the veteran Sylvanus. He is to the uninitiated a creature whose appearance is full of terrors, but he shrinks before the philosopher like ignorance before knowledge." So saying, he with one hand pulled down the curtain, under which the animal had nestled itself when it entered from the garden-window of the pavilion, and with the other, in which he had a staff uplifted, threatened to chastise the creature, with the words—"How now, Sylvanus! what insolence is this?—To your place!"

As, in uttering these words, he struck the animal, the blow unluckily lighted upon his wounded hand, and recalled its bitter smart. The wild temper of the creature returned, unsubdued for the moment by any awe of man; uttering a fierce, and, at the same time, stifled cry, it flew on the philosopher, and clasped its strong and sinewy arms about his throat with the utmost fury. The old man twisted and struggled to deliver himself from the creature's grasp, but in vain. Sylvan kept hold of his prize, compressed his sinewy arms, and abode by his purpose of not quitting his hold of the philosopher's throat until he had breathed his last. Two more bitter yells, accompanied each with a desperate contortion of the countenance, and squeeze of the hands, concluded, in less than five minutes, the dreadful strife.

Agelastes lay dead upon the ground, and his assassin, Sylvan, springing from the body as if terrified and alarmed at what he had done, made his escape by the window. The Countess stood in astonishment, not knowing exactly whether she had witnessed a supernatural display of the judgment of Heaven, or an instance of its vengeance by mere mortal means. Her new attendant Vexhella was no less astonished, though her acquaintance with the animal was considerably more intimate.

"Lady," she said, "that gigantic creature is an animal of great strength, resembling mankind in form, but huge in its size, and encouraged by

its immense power, sometimes malevolent in its intercourse with mortals. I have heard the Vangians often talk of it as belonging to the Imperial museum. It is fitting we remove the body of this unhappy man, and hide it in a plot of shrubbery in the garden. It is not likely that he will be missed to-night, and to-morrow there will be other matter astir, which will probably prevent much inquiry about him." The Countess Brenhilda assented, for she was not one of those timorous females to whom the countenance of the dead are objects of terror.

Trusting to the parole which she had given, Agelastes had permitted the Countess and her attendant the freedom of his gardens, of that part at least adjacent to the pavilion. They therefore were in little risk of interruption as they bore forth the dead body between them, and without much trouble disposed of it in the thickest part of one of the bosquets with which the garden was studded.

As they returned to their place of abode or confinement, the Countess, half speaking to herself, half addressing Vexhella, said, "I am sorry for this; not that the infamous wretch did not deserve the full punishment of Heaven coming upon him in the very moment of blasphemy and infidelity, but because the courage and truth of the unfortunate Brenhilda may be brought into suspicion, as his slaughter took place when he was alone with her and her attendant, and as no one was witness of the singular manner in which the old blasphemer met his end.—Thou knowest," she added, addressing herself to Heaven—"thou! blessed Lady of the Broken Lances, the protectress both of Brenhilda and her husband, well knowest, that whatever faults may be mine, I am free from the slightest suspicion of treachery; and into thy hands I put my cause, with a perfect reliance upon thy wisdom and bounty to bear evidence in my favor." So saying, they returned to the lodge unseen, and with pious and submissive prayers, the Countess closed that eventful evening.

#### CHAPTER XXVI.

Will you hear of a Spanish lady,  
How she wooed an Englishman!  
Garments gay, as rich as may be,  
Deck'd with jewels she had on.  
Of a comely countenance and grace was she,  
And by birth and parentage of high degree.

OLD BALLAD.

WE left Alexius Comnenus after he had unloaded his conscience in the ears of the Patriarch, and received from him a faithful assurance of the pardon and patronage of the national Church. He took leave of the dignitary with some exulting exclamations, so unexplicitly expressed, however, that it was by no means easy to conceive the meaning of what he said. His first inquiry, when he reached the Blacquernal, being for his daughter, he was directed to the room encrusted with beautifully carved marble,

from which she herself, and many of her race, derived the proud appellation of *Porphyrogenita*, or born in the purple. Her countenance was clouded with anxiety, which, at the sight of her father, broke out into open and uncontrollable grief.

"Daughter," said the Emperor, with a harshness little common to his manner, and a seriousness which he sternly maintained, instead of sympathizing with his daughter's affliction, "as you would prevent the silly fool with whom you are connected, from displaying himself to the public both as an ungrateful monster and a traitor, you will not fail to exhort him, by due submission, to make his petition for pardon, accompanied with a full confession of his crimes, or, by my sceptre and my crown, he shall die the death! Nor will I pardon any one who rushes upon his doom in an open tone of defiance, under such a standard of rebellion as my ungrateful son-in-law has hoisted."

"What can you require of me, father?" said the Princess. "Can you expect that I am to dip my own hands in the blood of this unfortunate man, or wilt thou seek a revenge yet more bloody than that which was exacted by the deities of antiquity, upon those criminals who offended against their divine power?"

"Think not so, my daughter!" said the Emperor; "but rather believe that thou hast the last opportunity afforded by my filial affection, of rescuing, perhaps from death, that silly fool thy husband, who has so richly deserved it."

"My father," said the Princess, "God knows it is not at your risk that I would wish to purchase the life of Nicephorus; but he has been the father of my children, though they are now no more, and women cannot forget that such a tie has existed, even though it has been broken by fate. Permit me only to hope that the unfortunate culprit shall have an opportunity of retrieving his errors; nor shall it, believe me, be my fault, if he resumes those practices, treasonable at once, and unnatural, by which his life is at present endangered."

"Follow me, then, daughter," said the Emperor, "and know, that to thee alone I am about to intrust a secret, upon which the safety of my life and crown, as well as the pardon of my son-in-law's life, will be found eventually to depend."

He then assumed in haste the garment of a slave of the Seraglio, and commanded his daughter to arrange her dress in a more succinct form, and to take in her hand a lighted lamp.

"Whither are we going, my father?" said Anna Comnena.

"It matters not," replied her father, "since my destiny calls me, and since thine ordains thee to be my torch-bearer. Believe me, and record it, if thou darest, in thy book, that Alexius Comnenus does not, without alarm, descend into those awful dungeons which his predecessors built for men, even when his intentions are innocent, and free from harm. Be silent, and should we meet any inhabitant of those inferior regions

speaking not a word nor make any observation upon his appearance."

Passing through the intricate apartments of the palace, they now came to that large hall through which Hereward had passed on the first night of his introduction to the place of Anna's recitation called the Temple of the Muses. It was constructed, as we have said, of black marble, dimly illuminated. At the upper end of the apartment, was a small altar, on which was laid some incense, while over the smoke was suspended, as if projecting from the wall, two imitations of human hands and arms, which were but imperfectly seen.

At the bottom of this hall, a small iron door led to a narrow and winding staircase, resembling a draw-well in shape and size, the steps of which were excessively steep, and which the Emperor, after a solemn gesture to his daughter, commanding her attendance, began to descend with the imperfect light, and by the narrow and difficult steps by which those who visited the under regions of the Blacquernal seemed to bid adieu to the light of day. Door after door they passed in their descent, leading, it was probable, to different ranges of dungeons, from which was obscurely heard the stifled voice of groans and sighs, such as attracted Hereward's attention on a former occasion. The Emperor took no notice of these signs of human misery, and three stories or ranges of dungeons had been already passed, ere the father and daughter arrived at the lowest story of the building, the base of which was the solid rock, roughly carved, upon which were erected the side-walls and arches of solid but unpolished marble.

"Here," said Alexius Comnenus, "all hope, all expectation takes farewell, at the turn of a hinge or the grating of a lock. Yet shall not this be always the case—the dead shall revive and resume their right, and the disinherited of these regions shall again prefer their claim to inhabit the upper world. If I cannot entreat Heaven to my assistance, be assured, my daughter, that rather than be the poor animal which I have stooped to be thought, and even to be painted in thy history, I would sooner brave every danger of the multitude which now erect themselves betwixt me and safety. Nothing is resolved save that I will live and die an Emperor; and thou, Anna, be assured, that if there is power in the beauty or in the talents, of which so much has been boasted, that power shall be this evening exercised to the advantage of thy parent, from whom it is derived."

"What is it that you mean, Imperial father?—Holy Virgin! is this the promise you made me to save the life of the unfortunate Nicephorus?"

"And so I will," said the Emperor; "and I am now about that action of benevolence. But think not I will once more warm in my bosom the household snake which had so nearly stung me to death. No, daughter, I have provided for thee a fitting husband, in one who is able to

maintain and defend the rights of the Emperor thy father;—and beware how thou opposest an obstacle to what is my pleasure! for behold these walls of marble, though unpolished, and recollect it is as possible to die within the marble as to be born there."

The Princess Anna Comnena was frightened at seeing her father in a state of mind entirely different from any which she had before witnessed. "O, Heaven! that my mother were here!" she ejaculated, in the terror of something she hardly knew what.

"Anna," said the Emperor, "your fears and your screams are alike in vain. I am one of those, who, on ordinary occasions, hardly nourish a wish of my own, and account myself obliged to those who, like my wife and daughter, take care to save me all the trouble of free judgment. But when the vessel is among the breakers, and the master is called to the helm, believe that no meaner hand shall be permitted to interfere with him, nor will the wife and daughter, whom he indulged in prosperity, be allowed to thwart his will while he can yet call it his own. Thou couldst scarcely fail to understand that I was almost prepared to have given thee, as a mark of my sincerity, to yonder obscure Varangian, without asking question of either birth or blood. Thou mayst hear when I next promise thee to a three years' inhabitant of these vaults, who shall be Cæsar in Briennius's stead, if I can move him to accept a princess for his bride, and an imperial crown for his inheritance, in place of a starving dungeon."

"I tremble at your words, father," said Anna Comnena; "how canst thou trust a man who hast felt thy cruelty?—How canst thou dream that aught can ever in sincerity reconcile thee to one whom thou hast deprived of his eyesight?"

"Care not for that," said Alexius; "he becomes mine, or he shall never know what it is to be again his own.—And thou, girl, mayst rest assured that, if I will it, thou art next day the bride of my present captive, or thou retirest to the most severe nunnery, never again to mix with society. Be silent, therefore, and await thy doom, as it shall come, and hope not that thy utmost endeavors can avert the current of thy destiny."

As he concluded this singular dialogue, in which he had assumed a tone to which his daughter was a stranger, and before which she trembled, he passed on through more than one strictly fastened door, while his daughter, with a faltering step, illuminated him on the obscure road. At length he found admittance by another passage into the cell in which Ursel was confined, and found him reclining in hopeless misery,—all those expectations having faded from his heart which the Count of Paris had by his indomitable gallantry for a time excited. He turned his sightless eyes towards the place where he heard the moving of bolts and the approach of steps.

"A new feature," he said, "in my imprisonment—a man comes with a heavy and determined step, and a woman or a child with one that scarcely presses the floor!—Is it my death that you bring?—Believe me, that I have lived long enough in these dungeons to bid my doom welcome."

"It is not thy death, noble Ursel," said the Emperor, in a voice somewhat disguised. "Life, liberty, whatever the world has to give, is placed by the Emperor Alexius at the feet of his noble enemy, and he trusts that many years of happiness and power, together with the command of a large share of the empire, will soon obliterate the recollection of the dungeons of the Blacquernal."

"It cannot be," said Ursel, with a sigh. "He upon whose eyes the sun has set even at middle day, can have nothing left to hope from the most advantageous change of circumstances."

"You are not entirely assured of that," said the Emperor; "allow us to convince you that what is intended towards you is truly favorable and liberal, and I hope you will be rewarded by finding that there is more possibility of amendment in your case, than your first apprehensions are willing to receive. Make an effort, and try whether your eyes are not sensible of the light of the lamp."

"Do with me," said Ursel, "according to your pleasure; I have neither strength to remonstrate, nor the force of mind equal to make me set your cruelty at defiance. Of something like light I am sensible; but whether it is reality or illusion, I cannot determine. If you are come to deliver me from this living sepulchre, I pray God to requite you; and if, under such deceitful pretence, you mean to take my life, I can only commend my soul to Heaven, and the vengeance due my death to Him who can behold the darkest places in which injustice can shroud itself."

So saying, and the revulsion of his spirits rendering him unable to give almost any other signs of existence, Ursel sunk back upon his seat of captivity, and spoke not another word during the time that Alexius disembarrassed him of those chains which had so long hung about him, that they almost seemed to make a part of his person.

"This is an affair in which thy aid can scarce be sufficient, Anna," said the Emperor; "it would have been well if you and I could have borne him into the open air by our joint strength, for there is little wisdom in showing the secrets of this prison-house to those to whom they are not yet known; nevertheless, go, my child, and at a short distance from the head of the staircase which we descended, thou wilt find Edward, the bold and trusty Varangian, who on your communicating to him my orders, will come hither and render his assistance; and see that you send also the experienced leech, Douban."

Terrified, half-stifled, and half-struck with

horror, the lady yet felt a degree of relief from the somewhat milder tone in which her father addressed her. With tottering steps, yet in some measure encouraged by the tenor of her instructions, she ascended the staircase which yawned upon these infernal dungeons. As she approached the top, a large and strong figure threw its broad shadow between the lamp and the opening of the hall. Frightened nearly to death at the thoughts of becoming the wife of a squalid wretch like Ursel, a moment of weakness seized upon the Princess's mind, and, when she considered the melancholy option which her father had placed before her, she could not but think that the handsome and gallant Varangian, who had already rescued the royal family from such imminent danger, was a fitter person with whom to unite herself, if she must needs make a second choice, than the singular and disgusting being whom her father's policy had raked from the bottom of the Blacquernal dungeons.

I will not say of poor Anna Comnena, who was a timid but not an unfeeling woman, that she would have embraced such a proposal, had not the life of her present husband Nicephorus Briennius been in extreme danger; and it was obviously the determination of the Emperor, that if he spared him, it should be on the sole condition of unloosing his daughter's hand, and binding her to some one of better faith, and possessed of a greater desire to prove an affectionate son-in-law. Neither did the plan of adopting the Varangian as a second husband, enter decidedly into the mind of the Princess. The present was a moment of danger, in which her rescue to be successful must be sudden, and perhaps, if once achieved, the lady might have had an opportunity of freeing herself both from Ursel and the Varangian, without disjoining either of them from her father's assistance, or of herself losing it. At any rate, the surest means of safety were to secure, if possible, the young soldier, whose features and appearance were of a kind which rendered the task no way disagreeable to a beautiful woman. The schemes of conquest are so natural to the fair sex, and the whole idea passed so quickly through Anna Comnena's mind, that having first entered while the soldier's shadow was interposed between her and the lamp, it had fully occupied her quick imagination, when, with deep reverence and great surprise at her sudden appearance on the ladder of Acheron, the Varangian advancing, knelt down, and lent his arm to the assistance of the fair lady, in order to help her out of the dreary staircase.

"Dearest Hereward," said the lady, with a degree of intimacy which seemed unusual, "how much do I rejoice in this dreadful night, to have fallen under your protection! I have been in places which the spirit of hell appears to have contrived for the human race." The alarm of the Princess, the familiarity of a beautiful woman, who, while in mortal fear, seeks refuge, like a frightened dove, in the bosom of the strong

and the brave, must be the excuse of Anna Comnena for the tender epithet with which she greeted Hereward; nor, if he had chosen to answer in the same tone, which, faithful as he was, might have proved the case if the meeting had chanced before he saw Bertha, would the daughter of Alexius have been, to say the truth, irreconcilably offended. Exhausted as she was, she suffered herself to repose upon the broad breast and shoulder of the Anglo-Saxon; nor did she make an attempt to recover herself, although the decorum of her sex and station seemed to recommend such an exertion. Hereward was obliged himself to ask her, with the unimpassioned and reverential demeanor of a private soldier to a Princess, whether he ought to summon her female attendants? to which she faintly uttered a negative. "No, no," said she, "I have a duty to execute for my father, and I must not summon eye-witnesses;—he knows me to be in safety, Hereward, since he knows I am with thee; and if I am a burden to you in my present state of weakness, I shall soon recover, if you will set me down upon the marble steps."

"Heaven forbid, lady," said Hereward, "that I were thus neglectful of your Highness's gracious health! I see your two young ladies, Astarte and Violante, are in quest of you. Permit me to summon them hither, and I will keep watch upon you if you are unable to retire to your chamber, where, methinks, the present disorder of your nerves will be most properly treated."

"Do as thou wilt, barbarian," said the Princess, rallying herself, with a certain degree of pique, arising perhaps from her not thinking more *dramatis personæ* were appropriate to the scene, than the two who were already upon the stage. Then, as if for the first time, appearing to recollect the message with which she had been commissioned, she exhorted the Varangian to repair instantly to her father.

On such occasions the slightest circumstances have their effect on the actors. The Anglo-Saxon was sensible that the Princess was somewhat offended, though whether she was so on account of her being actually in Hereward's arms, or whether the cause of her anger was the being nearly discovered there by the two young maidens, the sentinel did not presume to guess, but departed for the gloomy vaults to join Alexius, with the never-falling double-edged axe, the bane of many a Turk, glittering upon his shoulder.

Astarte and her companion had been dispatched by the Empress Irene in search of Anna Comnena, through those apartments of the palace which she was wont to inhabit. The daughter of Alexius could nowhere be found, although the business on which they were seeking her was described by the Empress as of the most pressing nature. Nothing, however, in a palace, passes altogether unespied, so that the Empress's messengers at length received information that their mistress and the Emperor had been seen to descend that gloomy access to the dungeons,

which, by allusion to the class, cal infernal regions, was termed the Pit of Acheron. They came thither accordingly, and we have related the consequences. Hereward thought it necessary to say that her Imperial Highness had swooned upon being suddenly brought into the upper air. The Princess, on the other part, briskly shook off her juvenile attendants, and declared herself ready to proceed to the chamber of her mother. The obeisance which she made Hereward at parting, had something in it of haughtiness, yet evidently qualified by a look of friendship and regard. As she passed an apartment in which some of the royal slaves were in waiting, she addressed to one of them, an old respectable man, of medical skill, a private and hurried order, desiring him to go to the assistance of her father, whom he would find at the bottom of the staircase called the Pit of Acheron, and to take his scimitar along with him. To hear, as usual, was to obey, and Douban, for that was his name, only replied by that significant sign which indicates immediate acquiescence. In the meantime, Anna Comnena herself hastened onward to her mother's apartments, in which she found the Empress alone.

"Go hence, maidens," said Irene, "and do not let any one have access to these apartments, even if the Emperor himself should command it. Shut the door," she said, "Anna Comnena; and if the jealousy of the stronger sex do not allow us the masculine privileges of bolts and bars, to secure the insides of our apartments, let us avail ourselves, as quickly as may be, of such opportunities as are permitted us; and remember, Princess, that however implicit your duty to your father, it is yet more so to me, who am of the same sex with thyself, and may truly call thee, even according to the letter, blood of my blood, and bone of my bone. Be assured thy father knows not, at this moment, the feelings of a woman. Neither he nor any man alive can justly conceive the pangs of the heart which beats under a woman's robe. These men, Anna, would tear asunder without scruple the tenderest ties of affection, the whole structure of domestic felicity, in which lie a woman's cares, her joy, her pain, her love, and her despair. Trust, therefore, to me, my daughter! and believe me, I will at once save thy father's crown and thy happiness. The conduct of thy husband has been wrong, most cruelly wrong; but, Anna, he is a man—and in calling him such, I lay to his charge, as natural frailties, thoughtless treachery, wanton infidelity, every species of folly and inconsistency to which his race is subject. You ought not, therefore, to think of his faults, unless it be to forgive them."

"Madam," said Anna Comnena, "forgive me if I remind you that you recommend to a princess, born in the purple itself, a line of conduct which would hardly become the female who carries the pitcher for the needful supply of water to the village well. All who are around me have been taught to pay me the obeisance due to

my birth, and while this Nicephorus Briennius crept on his knees to your daughter's hand, which you extended towards him, he was rather receiving the yoke of a mistress than accepting a household alliance with a wife. He has incurred his doom, without a touch even of that temptation which may be pleaded by lesser culprits in his condition; and if it is the will of my father that he should die, or suffer banishment, or imprisonment, for the crime he has committed, it is not the business of Anna Comnena to interfere, she being the most injured among the imperial family, who have in so many, and such gross respects, the right to complain of his falsehood."

"Daughter," replied the Empress, "so far I agree with you, that the treason of Nicephorus towards your father and myself has been in a great degree unpardonable; nor do I easily see on what footing, save that of generosity, his life could be saved. But still you are yourself in different circumstances from me, and may, as an affectionate and fond wife, compare the intimacies of your former habits with the bloody change which is so soon to be the consequence and the conclusion of his crimes. He is possessed of that person and of those features which women most readily recall to their memory, whether alive or dead. Think what it will cost you to recollect that the rugged executioner received his last salute,—that the shapely neck had no better repose than the rough block,—that the tongue, the sound of which you used to prefer to the choicest instruments of music, is silent in the dust!"

Anna, who was not insensible to the personal graces of her husband, was much affected by this forcible appeal. "Why distress me thus, mother?" she replied in a weeping accent. "Did I not feel as acutely as you would have me to do, this moment, however awful, would be easily borne. I had but to think of him as he is, to contrast his personal qualities with those of the mind, by which they are more than overbalanced, and resign myself to his deserved fate with unresisting submission to my father's will."

"And that," said the Empress, "would be to bind thee, by his sole fiat, to some obscure wretch, whose habits of plotting and intriguing had, by some miserable chance, given him the opportunity of becoming of importance to the Emperor, and who is, therefore, to be rewarded by the hand of Anna Comnena."

"Do not think so meanly of me, madam," said the Princess—"I know, as well as ever Grecian maiden did, how I should free myself from dishonor; and, you may trust me, you shall never blush for your daughter."

"Tell me not that," said the Empress, "since I shall blush alike for the relentless cruelty which gives up a once beloved husband to an ignominious death, and for the passion, for which I want a name, which would replace him by an obscure barbarian from the extremity of Thule, or some wretch escaped from the Blackquernal dungeons."

The Princess was astonished to perceive that her mother was acquainted with the purposes even, the most private, which her father had formed for his governance during this emergency. She was ignorant that Alexius and his royal consort, in other respects living together with a decency ever exemplary in people of their rank, had sometimes, on interesting occasions, family debates, in which the husband, provoked by the seeming unbelief of his partner, who was tempted to let her guess more of his real purposes than he would have coolly imparted of his own calm choice.

The Princess was affected at the anticipation of the death of her husband, nor could this have been reasonably supposed to be otherwise, but she was still more hurt and affronted by her mother taking it for granted that she designed upon the instant to replace the Caesar by an uncertain and at all events an unworthy successor. What ever considerations had operated to make Hereward her choice, their effect was lost when the match was placed in this odious and degrading point of view; besides which it is to be remembered, that women almost instinctively deny their first thoughts in favor of a suitor, and seldom willingly reveal them, unless time and circumstance concur to favor them. She called Heaven therefore passionately to witness, while she repelled the charge.

"Bear witness," she said, "Our Lady, Queen of Heaven! Bear witness, saints and martyrs all, ye blessed ones, who are, more than ourselves, the guardians of our mental purity! that I know no passion which I dare not avow, and that if Nicephorus's life depended on my entreaty to God and men, all his injurious acts towards me disregarded and despised, it should be as long as Heaven gave to those servants whom it snatched from the earth without suffering the pangs of mortality!"

"You have sworn boldly," said the Empress. "See, Anna Comnena, that you keep your word, for believe me it will be tried."

"What will be tried, mother?" said the Princess; "or what have I to do to pronounce the doom of the Caesar, who is not subject to my power?"

"I will show you," said the Empress gravely; and, leading her towards a sort of wardrobe, which formed a closet in the wall, she withdrew a curtain which hung before it, and placed before her her unfortunate husband, Nicephorus Briennius, half-attired, with his sword drawn in his hand. Looking upon him as an enemy, and conscious of some schemes with respect to him which had passed through her mind in the course of these troubles, the Princess screamed faintly, upon perceiving him so near her with a weapon in his hand.

"Be more composed," said the Empress, "or this wretched man, if discovered, falls no less a victim to thy idle fears than to thy baneful revenge."

Nicephorus at this speech seemed to have adopted his cue, for, dropping the point of his sword, and falling on his knees before the Princess, he clasped his hands to entreat for mercy.

"What hast thou to ask from me?" said his wife, naturally assured, by her husband's prostration, that the stronger force was upon her own side—"what hast thou to ask from me, that outraged gratitude, betrayed affection, and most solemn vows violated, and the fondest ties of nature torn asunder like the spider's broken web, will permit thee to put in words for very shame?"

"Do not suppose, Anna," replied the suppliant, "that I am at this eventful period of my life to play the hypocrite, for the purpose of saving the wretched remnant of a dishonored existence. I am but desirous to part in charity with thee, to make my peace with Heaven, and to nourish the last hope of making my way, though burdened with many crimes, to those regions in which alone I can find thy beauty, thy talents, equalled at least, if not excelled."

"You hear him, daughter?" said Irene; "his boon is for forgiveness alone; thy condition is the more godlike, since thou mayst unite the safety of his life with the pardon of his offences."

"Thou art deceived, mother," answered Anna. "It is not mine to pardon his guilt, far less to remit his punishment. You have taught me to think of myself as future ages shall know me; what will they say of me, those future ages, when I am described as the unfeeling daughter, who pardoned the intended assassin of her father, because she saw in him her own unfaithful husband?"

"See there," said the Cæsar, "is not that, most serene Empress, the very point of despair? and have I not in vain offered my life-blood to wipe out the stain of parricide and ingratitude? Have I not also vindicated myself from the most unpardonable part of the accusation, which charged me with attempting the murder of the godlike Emperor? Have I not sworn by all that is sacred to man, that my purpose went no farther than to sequester Alexius for a little time from the fatigues of empire, and place him where he should quietly enjoy ease and tranquillity? while, at the same time, his empire should be as implicitly regulated by himself, his sacred pleasure being transmitted through me, as in any respect, or at any period, it had ever been?"

"Erring man!" said the Princess, "hast thou approached so near the footstool of Alexius Comnenus, and durst thou form so false an estimate of him, as to conceive it possible that he would consent to be a mere puppet by whose intervention you might have brought his empire to submission? Know that the blood of Comnenus is not so poor; my father would have resisted the treason in arms; and by the death of thy benefactor only couldst thou have gratified the suggestions of thy criminal ambition."

"Be such your belief," said the Cæsar; "I have said enough for a life which is not and ought not to be dear to me. Call your guards, and let them take the life of the unfortunate Briennius, since it has become hateful to his once beloved Anna Comnena. Be not afraid that any resistance of mine shall render the scene of my apprehension dubious or fatal. Nicephorus Briennius is Cæsar no longer, and he thus throws at the feet of his Princess and spouse, the only poor means which he has of resisting the just doom which is therefore at her pleasure to pass."

He cast his sword before the feet of the Princess, while Irene exclaimed, weeping, or seeming to weep bitterly, "I have indeed read of such scenes! but could I ever have thought that my own daughter would have been the principal actress in one of them—could I ever have thought that her mind, admired by every one as a palace for the occupation of Apollo and the Muses, should not have had room enough for the humbler, but more amiable virtue of feminine charity and compassion, which builds itself a nest in the bosom of the lowest village girl? Do thy gifts, accomplishments, and talents, spread hardness as well as polish over thy heart? If so, a hundred times better renounce them all, and retain in their stead those gentle and domestic virtues which are the first honors of the female heart. A woman who is pitiless, is a worse monster than one who is unsexed by any other passion."

"What would you have me do?" said Anna. "You, mother, ought to know better than I, that the life of my father is hardly consistent with the existence of this bold and cruel man. O, I am sure he still meditates his purpose of conspiracy! He that could deceive a woman in the manner he has done me, will not relinquish a plan which is founded upon the death of his benefactor."

"You do me injustice, Anna," said Briennius, starting up, and imprinting a kiss upon her lips ere she was aware. "By this caress, the last that will pass between us, I swear, that if in my life I have yielded to folly, I have, notwithstanding, never been guilty of a treason of the heart towards a woman as superior to the rest of the female world in talents and accomplishments, as in personal beauty."

The Princess, much softened, shook her head, as she replied—"Ah, Nicephorus!—such were once your words! such, perhaps were then your thoughts! But who, or what, shall now warrant to me the veracity of either?"

"Those very accomplishments, and that very beauty itself," replied Nicephorus.

"And if more is wanting," said Irene, "thy mother will enter her security for him. Deem her not an insufficient pledge in this affair; she is thy mother, and the wife of Alexius Comnenus, interested beyond all human beings in the growth and increase of the power and dignity of her husband and her child; and one who sees on this occasion an opportunity for exercising generosity for soldering up the breaches of the Imperial

house, and reconstructing the frame of government upon a basis, which, if there be faith and gratitude in man, shall never be again exposed to hazard."

"To the reality of that faith and gratitude, then," said the Princess, "we must trust implicitly, as it is your will, mother; although even my own knowledge of the subject, both through study and experience of the world, has called me to observe the rashness of such confidence. But although we two may forgive Nicephorus's errors, the Emperor is still the person to whom the final reference must be had, both as to pardon and favor."

"Fear not Alexius," answered her mother; "he will speak determinedly and decidedly; but if he acts not in the very moment of forming the resolution, it is no more to be relied on than an icicle in time of thaw. Do thou apprise me, if thou canst, what the Emperor is at present doing, and take my word I will find means to bring him round to our opinion."

"Must I then betray secrets which my father has intrusted to me?" said the Princess; "and one who has so lately held the character of his avowed enemy?"

"Call it not betray," said Irene, "since it is written thou shalt betray no one, least of all thy father, and the father of the empire. Yet again it is written, by the holy Luke, that men shall be betrayed, both by parents and brethren, and kinsfolk and friends, and therefore surely also by daughters; by which I only mean thou shalt discover to us thy father's secrets, so far as may enable us to save the life of thy husband. The necessity of the case excuses whatever may be otherwise considered as irregular."

"Be it so then, mother. Having yielded my consent, perhaps too easily, to snatch this malefactor from my father's justice, I am sensible I must secure his safety by such means as are in my power. I left my father at the bottom of those stairs, called the Pit of Acheron, in the cell of a blind man, to whom he gave the name of Ursel."

"Holy Mary!" exclaimed the Empress, "thou hast named a name which has been long unspoken in the open air."

"Has the Emperor's sense of his danger from the living," said the Cæsar, "induced him to invoke the dead?—for Ursel has been no living man for the space of three years."

"It matters not," said Anna Comnena; "I tell you true. My father even now held conference with a miserable-looking prisoner, whom he so named."

"It is a danger the more," said the Cæsar; "he cannot have forgotten the zeal with which I embraced the cause of the present Emperor against his own; and so soon as he is at liberty, he will study to avenge it. For this we must endeavor to make some provision, though it increases our difficulties.—Sit down then, my gentle, my beneficent mother; and thou, my wife,

who hast preferred thy love for an unworthy husband to the suggestions of jealous passion and of headlong revenge, sit down, and let us see in what manner it may be in our power, consistently with your duty to the Emperor, to bring our broken vessel securely into port."

He employed much natural grace of manner in handing the mother and daughter to their seats; and, taking his place confidentially between them, all were soon engaged in concerting what measures should be taken for the morrow, not forgetting such as should at once have the effect of preserving the Cæsar's life, and at the same time of securing the Grecian empire against the conspiracy of which he had been the chief instigator. Briennius ventured to hint, that perhaps the best way would be to suffer the conspiracy to proceed as originally intended, pledging his own faith that the rights of Alexius should be held inviolate during the struggle; but his influence over the Empress and her daughter did not extend to obtaining so great a trust. They plainly protested against permitting him to leave the palace, or taking the least share in the confusion which to-morrow was certain to witness.

"You forget, noble ladies," said the Cæsar, "that my honor is concerned in meeting the Count of Paris."

"Pshaw! tell me not of your honor, Briennius," said Anna Comnena; "do I not well know, that although the honor of the western knights be a species of Moloch, a flesh-devouring, blood-quaffing demon, yet that which is the god of idolatry to the eastern warriors, though equally loud and noisy in the hall, is far less implacable in the field? Believe not that I have forgiven great injuries and insults, in order to take such false coin as *honor* in payment; your ingenuity is but poor, if you cannot devise some excuse which will satisfy the Greeks; and in good sooth, Briennius, to this battle you go not, whether for your good or for your ill. Believe not that I will consent to your meeting either Count or Countess, whether in warlike combat or amorous parley. So you may at a word count upon remaining prisoner here until the hour appointed for such gross folly be past and over."

The Cæsar, perhaps, was not in his heart angry that his wife's pleasure was so bluntly and resolutely expressed against the intended combat. "If," said he, "you are determined to take my honor into your own keeping, I am here for the present your prisoner, nor have I the means of interfering with your pleasure. When once at liberty, the free exercise of my valor and my lance is once more my own."

"Be it so, Sir Paladin," said the Princess, very composedly. "I have good hope that neither of them will involve you with any of yon dare-devils of Paris, whether male or female, and that we will regulate the pitch to which your courage soars, by the estimation of Greek philosophy, and the judgment of our blessed Lady of Mercy, not her of the Broken Lances."

At this moment an authoritative knock at the door alarmed the consultation of the Cæsar and the ladies.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

*Physician.*—Be comforted, good madam; the great rage, You see, is cured in him: and yet it is danger To make him even o'er the time he has lost. Desire him to go in: trouble him no more, Till further settling.

KING LEAR.

We left the Emperor Alexius Comnenus at the bottom of a subterranean vault, with a lamp expiring, and having charge of a prisoner, who seemed himself nearly reduced to the same extremity. For the first two or three moments, he listened after his daughter's retiring footsteps. He grew impatient, and began to long for her return before it was possible she could have traversed the path betwixt him and the summit of these gloomy stairs. A minute or two he endured with patience the absence of the assistance which he had sent her to summon; but strange suspicions began to cross his imagination. Could it be possible? Had she changed her purpose on account of the hard words which he had used towards her? Had she resolved to leave her father to his fate in his hour of utmost need? and was he to rely no longer upon the assistance which he had implored her to send?

The short time which the Princess trifled away in a sort of gallantry with the Varangian Hereward, was magnified tenfold by the impatience of the Emperor, who began to think that she was gone to fetch the accomplices of the Cæsar to assault their prince in his defenceless condition, and carry into effect their half-disconcerted conspiracy.

After a considerable time filled up with this feeling of agonizing uncertainty, he began at length, more composedly, to recollect the little chance there was that the Princess would, even for her own sake, resentful as she was in the highest degree of her husband's ill behavior, join her resources to his, to the destruction of one who had so generally showed himself an indulgent and affectionate father. When he had adopted this better mood, a step was heard upon the staircase, and after a long and unequal descent, Hereward, in his heavy armor, at length coolly arrived at the bottom of the steps. Behind him, panting and trembling, partly with cold and partly with terror, came Douban, the slave well skilled in medicine.

"Welcome, good Edward! Welcome, Douban!" he said, "whose medical skill is sufficiently able to counterbalance the weight of years which hang upon him."

"Your Highness is gracious," said Douban—but what he would have farther said was cut off by a violent fit of coughing, the consequence of his age, of his feeble habit, of the damps of the dungeon, and the rugged exercise of descending the long and difficult staircase.

"Thou art unaccustomed to visit thy patients in so rough an abode," said Alexius; "and, nevertheless, to the damps of these dreary regions state necessity obliges us to confine many, who are no less our beloved subjects in reality than they are in title."

The medical man continued his cough, perhaps as an apology for not giving that answer of assent, with which his conscience did not easily permit him to reply to an observation, which, though stated by one who should know the fact, seemed not in itself altogether likely.

"Yes, my Douban," said the Emperor, "in this strong case of steel and adamant have we found it necessary to enclose the redoubted Ursel, whose fame is spread through the whole world, both for military skill, political wisdom, personal bravery, and other noble gifts, which we have been obliged to obscure for a time, in order that we might, at the fittest conjuncture, which is now arrived, restore them to the world in their full lustre. Feel his pulse, therefore, Douban—consider him as one who hath suffered severe confinement, with all its privations, and is about to be suddenly restored to the full enjoyment of life, and whatever renders life valuable."

"I will do my best," said Douban; "but your Majesty must consider, that the work upon a frail and exhausted subject, whose health seems already well-nigh gone, and may perhaps vanish in an instant—like this pale and trembling light, whose precarious condition the life-breath of this unfortunate patient seems closely to resemble."

"Desire, therefore, good Douban, one or two of the mutes who serve in the interior, and who have repeatedly been thy assistants in such cases—or stay—Edward, thy motions will be more speedy; do thou go for the mutes—make them bring some kind of litter to transport the patient; and, Douban, do thou superintend the whole. Transport him instantly to a suitable apartment, only taking care that it be secret, and let him enjoy the comforts of the bath, and whatever else may tend to restore his feeble animation—keeping in mind, that he must, if possible, appear to-morrow in the field."

"That will be hard," said Douban, "after having been, it would appear, subjected to such fare and such usage as his fluctuating pulse intimates but too plainly."

"Twas a mistake of the dungeon-keeper, the inhuman villain, who should not go without his reward," continued the Emperor, "had not Heaven already bestowed it by the strange means of a sylvan man, or native of the woods, who yesterday put to death the jailer who meditated the death of his prisoner.—Yes, my dear Douban, a private sentinel of our guards called the Immortal, had well-nigh annihilated this flower of our trust, whom for a time we were compelled to immure in secret. Then, indeed, a rude hammer had dashed to pieces an unpar-

alleoed brilliant, but the fates have arrested such a misfortune."

The assistance having arrived, the physician, who seemed more accustomed to act than to speak, directed a bath to be prepared with medicated herbs, and gave it as his opinion, that the patient should not be disturbed till to-morrow's sun was high in the heavens. Ursel accordingly was assisted to the bath, which was employed according to the directions of the physician; but without affording any material symptoms of recovery. From thence he was transferred to a cheerful bedchamber, opening by an ample window to one of the terraces of the palace, which commanded an extensive prospect. These operations were performed upon a frame so extremely stupefied by previous suffering, so dead to the usual sensations of existence, that it was not till the sensibility should be gradually restored by friction of the stiffened limbs, and other means, that the leech hoped the mists of the intellect should at length begin to clear away.

Douban readily undertook to obey the commands of the Emperor, and remained by the bed of the patient until the dawn of the morning, ready to support nature as far as the skill of leechcraft admitted.

From the mutes, much more accustomed to be the executioners of the Emperor's displeasure than of his humanity, Douban selected one man of milder mood, and by Alexius's order, made him understand, that the task in which he was engaged was to be kept most strictly secret, while the hardened slave was astonished to find that the attentions paid to the sick were to be rendered with yet more mystery than the bloody offices of death and torture.

The passive patient received the various acts of attention which were rendered to him in silence; and if not totally without consciousness, at least without a distinct comprehension of their object. After the soothing operation of the bath, and the voluptuous exchange of the rude and musty pile of straw, on which he had stretched himself for years, for a couch of the softest down, Ursel was presented with a sedative draught, slightly tinctured with an opiate. The balmy restorer of nature came thus invoked, and the captive sunk into a delicious slumber long unknown to him, and which seemed to occupy equally his mental faculties and his bodily frame, while the features were relaxed from their rigid tenor, and the posture of the limbs, no longer disturbed by fits of cramp, and sudden and agonizing twitches and throes, seemed changed for a placid state of the most perfect ease and tranquillity.

The morn was already coloring the horizon, and the freshness of the breeze of dawn had insinuated itself into the lofty halls of the palace of the Blacqernal, when a gentle tap at the door of the chamber awakened Douban, who, undisturbed from the calm state of his patient, had indulged himself in a brief repose. The door

opened, and a figure appeared, disguised in the robes worn by an officer of the palace, and concealed, beneath an artificial beard of great size, and of a white color, the features of the Emperor himself. "Douban," said Alexius, "how fares it with thy patient, whose safety is this day of such consequence to the Grecian state?"

"Well, my lord," replied the physician, "excellently well; and if he is not now disturbed, I will wager whatever skill I possess, that Nature, assisted by the art of the physician, will triumph over the damps and the unwholesome air of the impure dungeon. Only be prudent, my lord, and let not an untimely haste bring this Ursel forward into the contest ere he has arranged the disturbed current of his ideas, and recovered, in some degree, the spring of his mind, and the powers of his body."

"I will rule my impatience," said the Emperor, "or rather, Douban, I will be ruled by thee. Think'st thou he is awake?"

"I am inclined to think so," said the leech, "but he opens not his eyes, and seems to me as if he absolutely resisted the natural impulse to rouse himself and look around him."

"Speak to him," said the Emperor, "and let us know what is passing in his mind."

"It is at some risk," replied the physician, "but you shall be obeyed.—Ursel," he said, approaching the bed of his blind patient, and then, in a louder tone, he repeated again, "Ursel! Ursel!"

"Peace—hush!" muttered the patient; "disturb not the blest in their ecstasy—nor again recall the most miserable of mortals to finish the draught of bitterness which his fate had compelled him to commence."

"Again, again," said the Emperor, aside to Douban, "try him yet again; it is of importance for me to know in what degree he possesses his senses, or in what measure they have disappeared from him."

"I would not, however," said the physician, "be the rash and guilty person, who, by an ill-timed urgency, should produce a total alienation of mind and plunge him back either into absolute lunacy, or produce a stupor, in which he might remain for a long period."

"Surely not," replied the Emperor; "my commands are those of one Christian to another, nor do I wish them farther obeyed than as they are consistent with the laws of God and man."

He paused for a moment after this declaration, and yet but few minutes had elapsed ere he again urged the leech to pursue the interrogation of his patient. "If you hold me not competent," said Douban, somewhat vain of the trust necessarily reposed in him, "to judge of the treatment of my patient, your Imperial Highness must take the risk and the trouble upon yourself."

"Marry, I shall," said the Emperor, "for the scruples of leeches are not to be indulged, when the fate of kingdoms and the lives of monarchs are placed against them in the scales.—Rouse

thee, my noble Ursel! hear a voice, with which thy ears were once well acquainted, welcome thee back to glory and command! Look around thee and see how the world smiles to welcome thee back from imprisonment to empire!"

"Cunning fiend!" said Ursel, "who useth the most wily baits in order to augment the misery of the wretched! Know, tempter, that I am conscious of the whole trick of the soothing images of last night—thy baths—thy beds—and thy powers of bliss.—But sooner shalt thou be able to bring a smile upon the cheek of St. Anthony the Eremitic, than induce me to curl mine after the fashion of earthly voluptuaries."

"Try it, foolish man," insisted the Emperor, "and trust to the evidence of thy senses for the reality of the pleasures by which thou art now surrounded; or, if thou art obstinate in thy lack of faith, tarry as thou art for a single moment and I will bring with me a being so unparalleled in her loveliness, that a single glance of her were worth the restoration of thine eyes, were it only to look upon her for a moment." So saying, he left the apartment.

"Traitor," said Ursel, "and deceiver of old, bring no one hither! and strive not, by shadowy and ideal forms of beauty, to increase the delusion that gilds my prison-house for a moment, in order, doubtless, to destroy totally the spark of reason, and then exchange this earthly hell for a dungeon in the infernal regions themselves."

"His mind is somewhat shattered," mused the physician, "which is often the consequence of a long solitary confinement. I marvel much," was his farther thought, "if the Emperor can shape out any rational service which this man can render him, after being so long immured in so horrible a dungeon.—Thou thinkest, then," continued he, addressing the patient, "that the seeming release of last night, with its baths and refreshments, was only a delusive dream, without any reality?"

"Ay—what else?" answered Ursel.

"And that the arousing thyself, as we desire thee to do, would be but a resigning to a vain temptation, in order to wake to more unhappiness than formerly?"

"Even so," returned the patient.

"What, then, are thy thoughts of the Emperor by whose command thou sufferest so severe a restraint?"

Perhaps Douban wished he had forborne this question, for, in the very moment when he put it, the door of the chamber opened, and the Emperor entered, with his daughter hanging upon his arm, dressed with simplicity, yet with becoming splendor. She had found time, it seems, to change her dress for a white robe, which resembled a kind of mourning, the chief ornament of which was a diamond chaplet, of inestimable value, which surrounded and bound the long simple tresses, that reached from her head to her waist. Terrified almost to death, she had been surprised by her father in the company of her

husband the Cæsar, and her mother; and the same thundering mandate had at once ordered Briennius, in the character of a more than suspected traitor, under the custody of a strong guard of Varangians, and commanded her to attend her father to the bedchamber of Ursel, in which she now stood; resolved, however, that she would stick by the sinking fortunes of her husband, even in the last extremity, yet no less determined that she would not rely upon her own entreaties or remonstrances, until she should see whether her father's interference was likely to reassume a resolved and positive character. Hastily as the plans of Alexius had been formed, and hastily as they had been disconcerted by accident, there remained no slight chance that he might be forced to come round to the purpose on which his wife and daughter had fixed their heart, the forgiveness, namely, of the guilty Nicephorus Briennius. To his astonishment, and not perhaps greatly to his satisfaction, he heard the patient deeply engaged with the physician in canvassing his own character.

"Think not," said Ursel in reply to him, "that though I am immured in this dungeon, and treated as something worse than an outcast of humanity—and although I am, moreover, deprived of my eyesight, the dearest gift of Heaven—think not, I say, though I suffer all this by the cruel will of Alexius Comnenus, that therefore I hold him to be mine enemy; on the contrary, it is by his means that the blinded and miserable prisoner has been taught to seek a liberty far more unconstrained than this poor earth can afford, and a vision far more clear than any Mount Pisgah on this wretched side of the grave can give us. Shall I therefore account the Emperor among mine enemies? He who has taught me the vanity of earthly things—the nothingness of earthly enjoyments—and the pure hope of a better world, as a certain exchange for the misery of the present? No!"

The Emperor had stood somewhat disconcerted at the beginning of this speech, but hearing it so very unexpectedly terminate, as he was willing to suppose, much in his own favor, he threw himself into an attitude which was partly that of a modest person listening to his own praises, and partly that of a man highly struck with the commendation heaped upon him by a generous adversary.

"My friend," he said aloud, "how truly do you read my purpose, when you suppose that the knowledge which men of your disposition can extract from evil, was all the experience which I wished you to derive from a captivity protracted by adverse circumstances, far, very far, beyond my wishes! Let me embrace the generous man who knows so well how to construe the purpose of a perplexed, but still faithful friend."

The patient raised himself in his bed.

"Hold there!" he said, "methinks my faculties begin to collect themselves. Yes," he muttered, "that is the treacherous voice which fir-

bade me welcome as a friend, and then commanded fiercely that I should be deprived of the sight of my eyes!—Increase thy rigor if thou wilt, Comnenus—add, if thou canst, to the torture of my confinement—but since I cannot see thy hypocritical and inhuman features, spare me, in mercy, the sound of a voice, more distressing to mine ear than toads, than serpents,—than whatever Nature has most offensive and disgusting!"

This speech was delivered with so much energy, that it was in vain that the Emperor strove to interrupt its tenor; although he himself, as well as Douban and his daughter, heard a great deal more of the language of unadorned and natural passion than he had counted upon.

"Raise thy head, rash man," he said, "and charm thy tongue, ere it proceed in a strain which may cost thee dear. Look at me, and see if I have not reserved a reward capable of atoning for all the evil which thy folly may charge to my account."

Hitherto the prisoner had remained with his eyes obstinately shut, regarding the imperfect recollections he had of sights which had been before his eyes the foregoing evening, as the mere suggestion of a deluded imagination, if not actually presented by some seducing spirit. But now when his eyes fairly encountered the stately figure of the Emperor, and the graceful form of his lovely daughter, painted in the tender rays of the morning dawn, he ejaculated faintly, "I see!—I see!"—And with that ejaculation fell back on the pillow in a swoon, which instantly found employment for Douban and his restoratives.

"A most wonderful cure indeed!" exclaimed the physician; "and the height of my wishes would be to possess such another miraculous restorative."

"Fool!" said the Emperor; "canst thou not conceive that what has never been taken away is restored with little difficulty? He was made," he said, lowering his voice, "to undergo a painful operation, which led him to believe that the organs of sight were destroyed; and as light scarcely ever visited him, and when it did, only in doubtful and almost invisible glimmerings, the prevailing darkness, both physical and mental that surrounded him, prevented him from being sensible of the existence of that precious faculty, of which he imagined himself bereft. Perhaps thou wilt ask my reason for inflicting upon him so strange a deception?—Simply it was, that being by it conceived incapable of reigning, his memory might pass out of the minds of the public, while, at the same time, I reserved his eyesight, that in case occasion should call, it might be in my power once more to liberate him from his dungeon, and employ, as I now propose to do, his courage and talents in the service of the empire, to counterbalance those of other conspirators."

"And can your Imperial Highness," said Douban, "hope that you have acquired this

man's duty and affection by the conduct you have observed to him?"

"I cannot tell," said the Emperor; "that must be as futurity shall determine. All I know is that it is no fault of mine, if Ursel does not reckon freedom and a long course of empire—perhaps sanctioned by an alliance with our own blood—and the continued enjoyment of the precious organs of eyesight, of which a less scrupulous man would have deprived him, against a maimed and darkened existence."

"Since such is your Highness's opinion and resolution," said Douban, "it is for me to aid, and not to counteract it. Permit me, therefore, to pray your Highness and the Princess to withdraw, that I may use such remedies as may confirm a mind which has been so strangely shaken, and restore to him fully the use of those eyes, of which he has been so long deprived."

"I am content, Douban," said the Emperor; "but take notice, Ursel is not totally at liberty until he has expressed the resolution to become actually mine. It may be both him and thee to know, that although there is no purpose of remitting him to the dungeons of the Blacquernal palace, yet if he, or any on his part, should aspire to head a party in these feverish times,—by the honor of a gentleman, to swear a Frankish oath, he shall find that he is not out of the reach of the battle-axes of my Varangians. I trust to thee to communicate this fact, which concerns alike him and all who have interest in his fortunes.—Come, daughter, we will withdraw, and leave the leech with his patient.—Take notice, Douban, it is of importance that you acquaint me the very first moment when the patient can hold rational communication with me."

Alexius and his accomplished daughter departed accordingly.

#### CHAPTER XXVIII.

Sweet are the uses of adversity,  
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,  
Bears yet a precious jewel in its head.

As YOU LIKE IT.

FROM a terraced roof of the Blacquernal palace, accessible by a sash-door, which opened from the bedchamber of Ursel, there was commanded one of the most lovely and striking views which the romantic neighborhood of Constantinople afforded.

After suffering him to repose and rest his agitated faculties, it was to this place that the physician led his patient; for when somewhat composed, he had of himself requested to be permitted to verify the truth of his restored eyesight, by looking out once more upon the majestic face of Nature.

On the one hand, the scene which he beheld was a masterpiece of human art. The proud city ornamented with stately buildings, as became the capital of the world, showed a succes-