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A Story of the Days of St. Patrick and St. Leo the Great

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A STORY OF THE DAYS OF
ST. PATRICK AND ST. LEO THE GREAT.

BY
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"CHRONICLES OF THE SCHÖNBERG-COTTA FAMILY," "AGAINST THE STREAM,"
"THREE MARTYRS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY," ETC.

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HISTORICAL SOURCES.

NOTE.

In this, as in all the historical fictions I have written, all words or deeds attributed to historical persons are, as far as I could ascertain, strictly historical.

The chief authorities for the history in this story are, the Latin Sermons and Epistles of St. Leo in the *Acta Sanctorum*, the writings of St. Patrick, Hodgkin's *Italy and her Invaders*, *L'histoire d'Attila*, by Amadée Thierry, Milman's *Latin Christianity*, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, *The Life of St. Leo*, by Canon Gore, and his article on St. Leo in *Smith's Dictionary of Christian Biography*, Canon Bright's *Translations of St. Leo's Sermons*, and various other authorities on Liturgies and ecclesiastical customs, usually deemed trustworthy.

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ATTILA AND HIS CONQUERORS.

CHAPTER I.
IN THE WHITE ROBES OF BAPTISM.

hey sat together on a crag close to their home, the young brother and sister, Baithene and Ethne, only son and daughter of a chieftain of the great clan O'Neill. Prince and princess they might have been called in legendary story, and their father and mother king and queen. For there were many kings in Ireland in those early centuries, as afterwards many saints. And yet neither of these great titles, though counted by the score, were unmeaning. The saints were men and women vowed and consecrated to a holy life of devotion and service:—a true aristocracy in the Church. Homage was rendered them because nobleness was expected of them. And the kings were distinguished as really, in the minds of their people and clan, from all beneath them, as men of another stamp and metal from the rest, with a royal superscription. To serve them was honour; to obey them was imperative necessity and sacred duty; to live for them was life worth living; to die for them was death worth dying. Conan, king or chief of one branch of the O'Neills, father of Baithene and Ethne, and his wife, however poor their palace and small their kingdom, were served and honoured with a free, unquestioning loyalty altogether unknown in the servile, mercenary courts of their contemporary sovereigns in the palaces of Constantinople or Ravenna.

Therefore these children—for they were scarcely more, the boy seventeen, the maiden sixteen—had been surrounded from infancy with an atmosphere of loving homage. Their home, outside which they sat, overlooking the sea, was not much better than a settler's lodge, built of mud and timber, with rough unhewn stones; yet it was essentially a palace, for those who dwelt in it were acknowledged to be royal. Outside, on the hill below, some of the clansmen guarded it night and day, and no stranger could enter unchallenged; it was the hall of feasting, the gathering-place for battle, the seat of judgment for the people. Except the brother and sister, and the guard watching on the hillside, out of sight at that moment, every one was asleep. For it was late; the sun had set an hour or two, the moon was making her long path of silvery light on the waves below, and the youth and maiden sat together in the soft evening air clad in the sacred white robes, Ethne still with the white veil on her head. For this had been a great day for them. There had been a Christian baptism on the hill of Tara, a few miles away, and in the well on the hillside the brother and sister, with their mother, had been baptized by the great missionary Patrick into the Christian name; and also, at the same time, numbers of their people, among them many of the Druids and bards, the priests and poets of their race. Their father had been present, but could not himself yet enter that solemn gate. He had too many wars on hand; too many clan wrongs that could not forego vengeance; too many enemies whom he was not quite clear he could include in the great peace which the Christ was said to bring. He was too sure of the rough work that might have to be done outside that gate of baptism, too doubtful of the kind of world he might find within, to venture yet to enter. But the message the Gallo-Roman bishop brought seemed so great, and from Powers so great, the story of compassion and sacrifice so beautiful, and his wife had adopted it with such joy, that he could not refuse that she and the children should enter a world that seemed so fair.

The mother had remained at Tara, with her husband and the chieftains, for the night; and the children were alone in the house, under the charge of the old nurse, with the rest of the household.

"I felt the bishop's hands rest on my head," said Baithene, in a low tone, "and his deep voice went through me. The words were Latin, but I think I understood most of them. We belong to the Father; He is the God of all men, of heavenand earth, of the sea and of the rivers, of the high mountains and the lowly valleys; above heaven, and in heaven, and under heaven. We are His children. And we belong to the Son. He is the King of all men. He died for us all. And we are His soldiers, and His clansmen, of His flesh and blood. And we belong to the Spirit. He is within our hearts, and will teach us and give us strength to be good children of the Father, and good soldiers of the Son, the Heavenly King. And this whole land of ours is only a little bit of His great kingdom. And this whole world of ours is only one of the halls of His great world. But it is worth while to be the son and daughter of an earthly king, for we may lead our whole people to the Heavenly King. Wonderful things have to be done, Ethne. Ireland has to be won for Him. The world has to be won for Him."

"Is not the world His already?" said the maiden. "Beyond that sea are they not all Christians? Our Patrick was made a Christian there, like the rest, before he was taken captive and brought to our land to be a slave, that he might make our country free; just as the great Christ came to this world to suffer and to die like a slave, to set the world free. Beyond the sea are the Britains, where Patrick's father lived. And beyond the Britains is Rome, the great Christian Empire of the world, and the great wonderful Christian city. We have been outside this Kingdom of God; but now we have come into it."

"But if the Britons on the other side of the sea (whose coasts we can see sometimes from ours) are Christians, why did they not tell us the glad tidings before?" said Baithene.

"Perhaps they tried, and could not make us listen," said Ethne. "People do not seem always to attend at first; father does not quite listen yet."

"He is the chief. The rights and the wrongs of the clan are his, and he must not pass them by," said Baithene.

"Must we not forgive?" said the girl. "Patrick forgave, and went first to those who had wronged him most and held him in bondage. And they tell us that the Christ when He rose went first to those who had murdered Him, the people of the Jews."

"We must forgive *our own* wrongs, I suppose," said Baithene, "but perhaps not other people's wrongs. At least not kings. Kings have to set the wrongs right. And there is the great blood-feud with the other branch of the O'Neills who killed our grandfather."

"It does not seem so very hard to forgive the people who killed our grandfather," said Ethne. "For one thing, they must be dead. And how long have we to go on not forgiving their grandchildren, who did not kill our grandfather?"

"I cannot tell," said Baithene, meditatively. "We have a great deal to learn; we must ask Patrick. We must learn more Latin, and read the Testaments of God."

There was a pause. The sound of the waves on the sands far below came up in soft pulses to them, and, nearer, the rush of the little river falling from rock to rock through the glen beside them.

“We will ask mother first,” resumed Ethne. “She looked like one of those beautiful creatures, the angels, when she rose up out of the waters. Her eyes shone as if with light within, and she did not seem to need wings to take her straight up to the sky. And when they folded her in the white robes, no one need have asked us, as they say the two princesses of our race asked Patrick, ‘Has the King of Heaven daughters?’ so heavenly she looked and so queenly. She seemed shining all through with love, the love which seems the light of heaven! Perhaps that love is the secret of forgiveness and of everything.”

“Yet,” replied Baithene, “love is of many kinds, and has many ways. There is the love of the sheep who are cared for, and the love of the shepherd who guards the sheep, and the love of the faithful dogs who help the shepherd to fight the wolf. Perhaps the love of the king has sometimes to be of the fighting kind.”

At that moment the great Irish deer-hound at Ethne’s feet gave a low, suspicious growl.

“Quiet, Bran,” said Baithene; “it is only a rustle among the trees in the glen.”

“Do you ever feel,” he resumed, “a great longing to go and see that great world beyond the seas, where the great cities are, and above all Rome, with her palaces, her armies, and her Emperor, and the great temples? There is so much to see and to hear!”

“No,” said Ethne, “I never want to wander from home, and the dear people who love us so dearly, who would give their lives for us.”

As she spoke the old nurse came out with two large woollen plaids, and wrapped the girl round and round in their warm folds from head to foot, laying the other over the shoulders of Baithene, who crossed it around him.

“The mother would have you come in soon, I think,” she said.

“Soon—in an instant!” they answered. “But there will never be another day quite like this in all our lives, and we want to live it to the end.”

And when the old nurse had left, Ethne said—

“Every bit of the world seems so close to the heavenly King, why should I wish to be anywhere but where we are; where all our beloved are; where our father and mother have the homage of all; where all would die for us; where all would follow us in life and death; where a word from our lips is law, and a wish of our hearts is understood and obeyed before we can speak it?”

“It is *for these*, it is just because of their love, I sometimes wish to go afar and learn,” replied Baithene. “The world seems so wide and so wise there beyond—I want to bring back treasures, such as Patrick himself has brought to our Ireland.”

Ethne looked up in his face with a tender anxiety.

“Would you leave us, brother beloved?” said she.

“Only to enrich you all, darling,” he said, “to win back treasures for all.”

“But it is *you* we want,” said Ethne, “not anything you could bring. What could you bring to us to make up for the loss of what you are to us? And how could you learn to serve our people as well as by being with them always from boyhood to grey hairs?”

He smiled.

“Then you never wish to see the world beyond?”

“Why should I? Above all, now that we have found the gate into the great world beyond and above, and have learned that the Light of all the world is with us everywhere.”

And in a low sweet voice she began to chant Patrick’s Irish hymn—

“Christ beside me, Christ before me;
Christ behind me, Christ within me;
Christ beneath me, Christ above me;
Christ on my right hand, Christ on my
left.”

Again the deer-hound gave a growl, but this time louder, and followed by a short anxious bark. There was again a soft rustle among the trees in the glen below them, but it ceased, and there was silence again, and Ethne threw her arm round the dog, and said—

“Hush, Bran darling; you must no longer be a suspicious heathen dog. Quiet!”

He lay down again with his head on her knee, licking her hand in response to her caress, yet still with ears pricked up, and an occasional anxious quiver through his whole frame.

The brother and sister turned from the glen and looked again towards the sea. The moon had gone behind a cloud, and only a fitful gleam came now and then over the waves. In a low, sweet voice Ethne began again to chant Patrick’s Irish hymn—

"I bind to myself to-day,
The Power of God to guide me;
The Might of God to uphold me;
The Wisdom of God to teach me;
The Eye of God to watch over me;
The Ear of God to hear me;
The Word of God to give me speech;
The Hand of God to protect me;
The Way of God to prevent me;
The Shield of God to shelter me;
The Hosts of God to defend me—
Against the snares of demons;
Against the temptations of vices;
Against every man who meditates injury to
me,
Whether far or near,
With few or with many."

The words had scarcely left her lips, when through the dark, with the suddenness and the silence of lightning, which the thunder does not precede to warn, but follows, to increase its terror, a band of armed men came on them from the glen behind, folded their plaids around both brother and sister, and with the practised skill of professional pirates, muffled their faces so that not a cry could escape; then bound their limbs with ropes, and swept them away helpless as branches of felled trees. Bran, the dog, made indeed all the noise he could, flew at the throat of one of the band, barked and yelled savagely. One of them tried to drive him away with a club, and another was on the point of cleaving his skull with a battle-axe, when the leader stopped him, saying—

"Let the brute be, he is worth more than either of *them*; I sold one such once in Rome for well-nigh his weight in gold."

"What is your gold to me, if the brute gets at my throat?" was the angry answer; "he has bitten my leg to the bone already."

"What matters a scratch in your leg? you are no babe to cry for a little blood-letting. Let the brute be. They are faithful to death. Keep hold of his master, and the beast will follow."

"A bad catch altogether," muttered the man. "These are two more of these new Christians; I saw the white robes of baptism underneath the plaids, and I heard the Sacred Name on the girl's lips," and he crossed himself in fear.

"What is that to thee or me?" exclaimed the leader. "What are these Roman Christians to us? Did they not leave us to the heathen Saxons?"

All this Ethne and Baithene heard and partly understood, the language being akin to their own, as they were dragged and carried helplessly down together to the little creek below, where the British pirate vessel was drawn up on the shingle. There they were lifted into the flat-bottomed boat, and laid bound and gagged and half-stifled at the bottom. Bran swam after them, jumped into the boat, and lay down at their feet.

When they had rowed out of reach and hearing of the shore the ropes were slackened, and the folds of the plaid around their faces were loosened. They could not stir, but they could look at each other; and as the night wore on, and the sails were set, and some of the crew fell asleep, and others were busy with the steering and rigging, Ethne whispered, with the tears she could no longer keep back, nor raise her hands to wipe away, streaming down her cheeks—

"Brother, I am coming with thee to the lands beyond. It will all be well; we are not forgotten."

But Baithene could only murmur in his anguish,

"It is my fault, all mine—the punishment of my restless discontent."

"It was no restless discontent, it was the instinct in the swallows when they have to fly south," she said. "We will learn our lessons and come home to rest."

And softly smiling through her tears, she crooned the words of the Irish hymn—

"Christ in the
chariot;
Christ in the ship;"

and then in her broken Latin the conclusion—

"Domini est salus,
Christi est salus,
Salus tua, Domine,
Sit semper
nobiscum."

But Baithene could only heave one long sob.

"Darling," she said, "I think it will be all right for us all. We will learn Latin together, and come back together to the home." She tried to add, "to our father and mother," but the dear names seemed to choke her, and were lost in tears.

CHAPTER II.
THE HOUSE ON THE AVENTINE.

hat same night in Rome, the great city of wonders of which Baithene, the young Irish chieftain, had dreamt, and to which he was being swept in the irresistible tide which still swayed the world thitherward, the same moon which had shone on the brother and sister on the Irish shore and lighted the pirates to their capture, looked down in all her southern lustre on a mother and daughter watching in one of the palaces on the Aventine for the return of the father and son from a great banquet.

They were in an open colonnade looking on the garden, the perfume of violets and roses breathing around them. The mother was reclining on a couch cushioned and draped with Oriental silks. At her feet, her head resting against her mother's hand, sat the young daughter Lucia. The mother was a Sicilian Greek, tracing her descent in a double line from the early Spartan and Athenian colonists. In both faces could be seen the fine curves and lines of the early Greek art. But while the mother's face was calm as a statue, touched with a sweet gravity and sadness, the girl's was full of brilliant life, dark eyes flashing, pearly teeth glistening, bright colour coming and going—the whole countenance continually changing with every shade of thought and feeling. The mother would have had her called after a saint, and her father, Fabricius, a patrician of the ancient Anician house, would have had her named after one of the ancient heroines of his people; so by way of compromise they had given her the name of Lucia, combining the memory of the Sicilian saint with the perilous eyes, and all images and visions of illumined and luminous creatures in earth and heaven.

"When will this banquet at our old kinsman's be over?" said the girl. "Mother, some of the maidens, my young cousins, younger than I, have seen so many things, I feel like an infant beside them. When will you take me to some of these great festivities? Our kinsman Petronius Maximus is such a great and virtuous man, they say, as well as a patrician and a senator, and to-night the Imperial Court are to be there, and perhaps the beautiful Empress Eudoxia."

"My child would not leave me?" said Damaris, the mother.

"No, that thou knowest well; but I would go with you, if it were only once, if not to the Circensian games, or the theatre, at least to this house of our kinsman. His wife, moreover, is so grave and sweet; we love her. And he is such an upholder of everything orderly and proper. They say he rules his time by his clypsedra, the water-clock, and lets nothing overstep its right moment—pleasure, and study, and work, and sleep, and banquets. Father says he is like an ancient Roman cut in miniature on a gem, and you would not think it dangerous to dine with an ancient Roman, like Scipio Africanus, or Fabius Maximus, or Numa Pompilius, however dull it might be!" she added, laughing.

"They were heathens, the ancient Romans," replied the mother, driven to bay.

"I know," replied Lucia; "and that is another reason for its being preferable to going to dine with our cousin Petronius Maximus. He is*not* a heathen; and, moreover, Marius said the Emperor Valentinian would probably be there."

The mother shuddered visibly.

"That is no reason for any good maiden or matron being there," she said. "God forbid that we should risk our pearl amidst the wickedness of the court of Ravenna."

"They would not be wicked to us," replied the girl, with a scornful curl of the beautiful lips. "We are of the Anician house, no new family like these Byzantines!"

"We have seen too many of the ancient Roman names on the roll of the slaves," replied Damaris. "It is scarcely forty years since from the ruins of this palace, where our noble kinswoman Marcella lived, and where the holy women of the Ecclesia Domestica came and listened to Jerome, she was borne, bruised and beggared, to die in one of the basilicas, during the siege and sack of Alaric the Goth."

"But, mother, all that is ancient history now. Alaric has been lying forty years in the bed of the river they turned aside to make his tomb. And this old Rome of ours, which he sacked and tried to ruin, lives on."

"Lives?—yes!" was the mournful answer. "Rome is still living, still dying."

"But, mother," resumed the maiden, after a pause, "the world is always dying, the sermons say; yet the children are always being born into it, and we are the children now, and have to live."

"There is another city," said the mother, tenderly stroking the dark tresses as they fell unbound on her arm, "the City of God, always dying from earth, but ever living."

"You are thinking of Saint Augustine's great book," said Lucia; "you have heard Augustine's own voice?"

"Once at Hippo, once at Ostia, where his mother, the blessed Monica, died in such joy. Augustine died, you know, at Hippo, ten years since, amongst his flock, during the siege of the Vandals."

"Augustine could not save his Hippo from the Vandals," said Lucia; "then*he* could scarcely have died with great joy, when he had so many of his flock to leave in misery."

"He died in faith," said Damaris gravely, "finding comfort in taking his place among the lowest, repeating the penitential psalms."

"They must be very terrible, those Vandals," resumed Lucia. "I am glad it was the Goths and not the Vandals that sacked our Rome; theywould have left little behind. And, moreover, the Vandals are Arians, which makes them know how to distinguish and persecute the Catholic Christians better than the heathen can. Mother, is the Emperor Valentinian, who is so far from being good, a Catholic?"

“He supports the Catholics. He listens to our Bishop Leo, like his Aunt Pulcheria, Empress of the East.”

“It seems almost a pity a wicked emperor should be a Catholic,” said Lucia meditatively. “It seems so much easier to understand when the people who do wrong think wrong too.”

There was a pause, then the mother said—

“There have been great voices in the Church, not so long ago: Athanasius of Alexandria, firm against the world; John of Antioch and Constantinople, the Golden-mouthed; and our old lion Jerome, so rude to feminine affectations, so suspicious of feminine wiles, so reverent and tender to true womanhood—Jerome, who spoke in this our palace, who gave us the Bible in the vulgar tongue—in Latin every one can read. But they are all silent now—Athanasius for seventy years, Chrysostom more than forty, Jerome thirty, Augustine only ten—great voices. And three of them, Athanasius, Augustine, and Jerome, were heard in the streets, in the palaces, in the basilicas of our Rome.”

“It must have been easier and better to live forty or fifty years ago,” said the maiden; “but we cannot help having to live now,” she added, looking up suddenly into her mother’s eyes. “Mother, did Athanasius, and Chrysostom, and Augustine, and Jerome think their own times so very good to live in? Were they pleased with the men and women around them? It scarcely seems so from the bits I have heard father read from Augustine’s *City of God*, or Jerome’s letters to our relations, the good women of the Aventine of old. But are there no great voices now?”

Damaris thought a little, and then she said humbly and softly—

“There is our own Leo, thank God. God forbid we should be among those who only recognize the saints when we have to build their sepulchres.”

Lucia knelt down beside her mother’s couch.

“Father says Bishop Leo is a real Roman, not in miniature,” she said; “and Marius says, though a priest, he is worth all the generals and consuls and prefects together. Oh, mother, it is good to hear of some one strong and good in these days.”

“Let us say our Leo’s prayer,” said Damaris softly: “‘Give us the spirit to think and do always such things as be rightful, that we who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy Will.’”

As they sat together silent afterwards, sounds came from the neighbouring hill, the Cœlian, and along the quays by the Tiber below, of chariot-wheels, and broken strains of songs and laughter, with tumultuous voices, as of a crowd of revellers dispersing hither and thither. In a few minutes one of those waves of sound broke against their own palace. Dogs barked welcomes from within; there was a rush of slaves to meet the coming cavalcade, and soon the father and brother came into the porch, and greeted the mother and Lucia.

“A magnificent banquet,” said Fabricius, “our cousin Petronius Maximus excelled himself. Gold and silver and gems, wines from every coast, viands from every land, troops of slaves robed like Oriental satraps; songs in every language, mimes, actors, dancing-girls; and yet everything irreproachably virtuous and respectable.”

“Also,” interposed Marius, “an oration in clever imitation of classical Latin, from a young man from the provinces, Sidonius Apollinaris;” and with a little of the superciliousness of the Imperial Metropolis he added, “This young noble told me he numbered among his intimates poets equal to Homer, Plato, and Euripides, to say nothing of Virgil and Horace.”

“What did he speak about in his oration?” asked Lucia.

“What did he *not* speak about?” was the reply. “Gods and goddesses, nymphs and heroes, sun-gods, earth-gods, gods under the earth, all bringing wreaths, gems, stars, anything, everything, to the feet of the greatest of all, Valentinian the Third, Emperor of the West, lord of all hearts and hearths.”

“Is he then a pagan?”

“A pagan!—by no means. Pagans, genuine pagans, bring offerings to their gods and goddesses—don’t bring their gods and goddesses to pay tribute to Cæsar.”

“Aetius was there also,” said Fabricius, “the Count of Italy, the great general who has been defending the Empire.”

“What did he say?” asked Damaris.

Fabricius replied—

“He said to me softly as we came away, that it was just as well Attila the Hun should not be present at such a banquet.”

“What has Attila to do with it?” asked Lucia.

“He has hundreds of thousands of savages at his command,” replied her father. “And Honoria, the Emperor’s sister, has sent him a betrothal ring, requesting him to come and marry her, to set her free from the tyranny of her imperial relations, and to accept as her dowry half the Empire. And Attila accepts the proposal, and promises to come with his hundreds of thousands of savages as a bridal train, to lay Italy waste on his way, and probably throw the plunder of Rome in as a bridal gift.”

“It is some farce Petronius Maximus got up for your amusement you are telling us of, not a fact!” said Damaris.

“The Emperor may think it all a farce,” said Fabricius, “but scarcely the General Aetius, the Count of Italy.”

“What is the General Aetius proposing to do?”

“To go back to Gaul, and keep Attila there if he can,” replied Fabricius, “and to play his old game of setting the barbarians against each other. But the barbarians seem to have learnt the game, and not to enjoy it, so that it becomes more and more difficult to win. It almost seems as if the Romans would have to learn to fight their own battles again themselves.”

“Father,” said Marius, “let me be one such Roman. Let me go to the provinces and fight these savages back! The Goths, they say, were civilized citizens compared with these Huns.”

“With whom would you go?” said Fabricius. “With your young friend Sidonius Apollinaris, his Platos and Homers, his classical Latin and his elegant villas?”

“No; with Aetius, to the battle-field, wherever that may be.”

“The battle-field is everywhere, perhaps at its hardest here at the heart of the corruption,” Fabricius said, laying his hand on the young man’s shoulder, yet with evident pride in his proposal. “Did we not see a portion of it as we came home to-night?”

“Where? What?” said Lucia.

“We were delayed in passing one of the basilicas,” said Fabricius; “there was a midnight service—we are still, you remember, in the octave of Easter. A procession of priests was coming out, and some of the troops of revellers around us were excited with wine, and there were rough jests, when the Bishop Leo himself appeared, and the noisiest revellers shrank away ashamed, and all was quiet.”

“Indeed, every one bows before Bishop Leo,” Marius said.

“Yes,” said Fabricius; “since the time of his election, when, during his absence on a mission of peace-making in Gaul, our impatient, restless Rome waited forty days tranquilly for his return, every one knows who is the true shepherd and ruler of Rome.”

“His battle-field is the oratory and the basilica,” said Damaris softly, “and therefore his presence brings peace to the world and to the city.”

Marius’ face lighted up, and he exclaimed—

“Then if Bishop Leo counselled that the post on the battle-field for me was on the frontier, face to face with the Huns, you would be content that I should go?”

“I must go to Bishop Leo’s own secret battle-field myself,” she said, “before I can answer thee.”

CHAPTER III.
YOUNG IN AN OLD WORLD.

here was little sleep for Damaris that night. The sun was just beginning to gild the palaces on the Aventine, and the sounds of labour had scarcely begun to stir on the busy quays of the Tiber below, when the mother rose and went to what she had called the battle-field of Leo, the secret place of prayer, which for her was usually the half-ruined oratory in the palace, where once had arisen the prayers and praises of Jerome and Marcella, and the Ecclesia Domestica.

"Thou knowest," she prayed, "O All-seeing, how I have asked that he might be kept from temptation, the temptations of this corrupt city. If this is Thy way of escape, from the seductions of the city to the battle-field of the nations, among the perils of the frontier, let him go! Better the spears and arrows of the barbarians than the fangs of the serpents around us here, the malaria of the seven hills, the festering cancer of this wicked court, at the heart of the Empire, poisoning the very springs of life! If this is Thy way of escape for him, O Father of all the fathers and mothers of the world, not for a moment would I hold him back. Take him for Thy hard warfare! Only show him when and how!"

As she came back through the wilderness of roses which led to the house, there was a wonderful lightness in her step, and brightness in her eyes.

Lucia was watching her from the porch, and ran to meet her.

"Hast thou been taking counsel of the bishop already?" she said.

"No, not of Leo," replied Damaris; "why should I trouble Leo, who has the care on him of all the Churches? Thou rememberest the words of Leo himself—'The whole people of His adoption is royal and sacerdotal; we have the ceaseless propitiation of the omnipotent and perfect Priest; and although He has committed the care of His sheep to many pastors, He Himself, nevertheless, has not abandoned the custody of His beloved flock.' So, by the counsel of our own wise shepherd, I went as one of the countless flock to the Chief Shepherd of all."

"The Shepherd who cares even for the little wilful kid," whispered Lucia, "as thou hast so often shown us in the picture in the catacombs; and He has heard thee and made thee glad, and has given thee what thou hast asked?"

"Heard me and made me glad indeed," said the mother; "but scarcely given me what I could have dared to ask or to wish, though with all my soul I *will* it if He wills it."

"About our Marius, mother?"

The mother bowed in acquiescence, and said in a low voice—

"I think, dearest, we may have to let him go."

"To the frontiers, among the barbarians, the Huns! But they say all the other barbarians were angels compared with these, who seem half wild beast and half witch."

"There are no half beasts in our Christian creed," said the mother; "only creatures once 'very good,' made in the image of God, now fallen angels and fallen men, and none fallen below the depths of the Redeeming Cross. The roots of the Tree of Life are deeper than the roots of any poison tree."

"But, mother, Marius would be going not to redeem the Huns, but to hunt and slay them; not as a shepherd or a priest, but as a soldier, would he not?"

"That is true," Damaris replied; "but even the shepherd has sometimes to slay the lion and the bear."

"But it is our own Marius," exclaimed Lucia, passionately escaping from allegory; "he will go to lead our Roman soldiers, some of them, father says, so feebly armed, so effeminate, that they have thrown off the old armour, the heavy helmets and shields, preferring to run the risk on the battle-field rather than to bear the weight on the march, and therefore when the battle comes, often taking refuge in cowardly flight. And against him will be those fierce, nimble Huns, or the tall athletic Goths, who don't mind being killed, father says, if they can only kill enough of the enemy first. And the enemy will be our Marius, who will never run away, and will be among those ill-armed cowards who will take to flight and let him stay and die!"

Damaris' eyes flashed.

"Who knows," she said, "but that our Marius will inspire his Romans with the old Roman courage, so that they will stay by him, and *not* die, but conquer; or, if they die, die conquering at their post?"

Lucia embraced her mother amidst her tears.

"Ah, mother," she said, "did not some of your old Greek forefathers descend from the three hundred who died at Thermopylæ?"

"It was said so amongst us," Damaris replied. "And certainly your father's house belonged to those old Romans who drove Hannibal back to Carthage."

"Ah, mother," said Lucia, "perhaps after all it is best our Marius should go to fight the Huns."

They had reached the porch, and as Lucia spoke the last words, Marius, who had come silently up to them and heard what she said, looked with a radiant smile into his mother's eyes.

"Then, mother," he said, "I shall not have to fight for this purpose of my life with thee? And, with thy blessing, the Huns are easy foes."

She laid her hand on his, and the compact between them was sealed.

Lucia glided away, and left the mother and son together. There was never need of many words between these two. Her faith in God, her unquenchable hope for mankind through the Incarnate Lord and Son of Man, had always been the atmosphere around his inmost life. To her, Christianity was the revelation of beauty as well as of truth; the law of life by which all things grow fair as well as strong; and of all beauty, beauty of character and soul the fairest of all. And a word from her to him, her son and heir in character and soul, was always a glimpse into the world of light within her soul, which he knew so well. Nevertheless he knew and she knew, that for him the disorders and miseries and sins of the world around had sometimes eaten deep into his power of believing in the presence of the Omnipotent Love above and beneath all. He had often felt dimly, and now she recognized consciously for him, that to realize the Love which conquers he needed to be in the army of the Conqueror, to be fighting not merely with the doubts within or the countless subtle heresies around, but with the concrete sin and misery, wrong and disorder of this visible, tangible world. The blood of the old Roman rulers of themselves and of the world, conquerors and law-givers, was in him, as well as the subtle perception of the old Greeks. She felt she had to let him go forth to the great world-battle; and knowing this, she would have him go forth, not weakened by her tears, but crowned by her smile and her blessing. And so he went.

There was little difficulty in finding an appointment for Marius when his purpose was understood. The difficulty amongst the luxurious court and intriguing officials, whose principle was to do as little and get as much as possible, was to understand how any one who might have had an easy, splendid life at home could wish to rush into peril and toil at the tumultuous frontiers of the Empire. A post was therefore easily obtained in connection with the forces of Aetius, and the day soon arrived when Marius had to set off for Gaul. His last day at home was Sunday. They began it in the early morning in the basilica of Saint Agnes, by the catacombs outside the walls.

Damaris delighted on special occasions to celebrate the Passion near the resting-places of the early martyrs. The subterraneous galleries and chapels among the tombs were familiar to Marius and Lucia from childhood; the frescoes of the Good Shepherd, the Orpheus building up the Holy City by his Divine music, the inscriptions of immortal Peace and Hope were interwoven with every sacred memory of their lives. Among the names of the martyrs were not a few of their own kindred in the past.

The brother and sister walked home among the vineyards and gardens, and the vividness of the sunshine struck them with a sharp contrast as they came out from the subterranean chill and shadow. The pulses of youth beat high in them both, and everything was intensified by the thought of the change and parting so near.

It was one of those moments in life like those which sometimes at sunset deepen every colour, and concentrate the broken lights and shadows into the unity of a picture. A new meaning seemed to come into the most common things, and a new unity and significance into their own lives.

“What an inheritance we have had!” Marius said, as they looked up to the hills, at the temples still standing on the Capitol, at the palaces still complete and splendid on the Palatine, at the quays still full of busy life on the Tiber. “What it is to have the familiar pictures of our childhood, those monuments of the greatness of old Rome, of the beauty of Greece!”

“And *our* Rome and *our* Greece!” said Lucia; “to have lisped the language the old Romans spoke, Cicero and Virgil, and the old Greeks, Homer and Plato, in our infancy; to have two such mother-tongues! We ought to be very wise, Marius!”

“To have listened to the very words Paul spoke, and Peter, and John the beloved,” said Marius, “from such a mother’s lips! We ought to be very good, Lucia!”

There was a pause. Then Lucia resumed—

“Brother, I sometimes feel such a hypocrite beside mother. She is always trying to guard me with her dear, delicate hands from the great wickedness of the world; she thinks I know nothing of the wickedness of the world, of this wicked Rome. And,” she continued, hesitating, “sometimes I feel as if she were an innocent babe beside me, whom I ought to guard! I feel so dreadfully wise as to the wickedness of the world, so *old* beside mother.”

He looked down admiringly and protectively on the pure sweet face, the downcast eyelids, the long lashes shading the round, rosy cheeks.

“You are certainly terribly experienced in the ways of the world!” he said. “I suppose our mother will always be as young as the angels. But I think the world itself is so very old just now, that we who belong to this generation are born old, and the older people who belonged to nobler and better times are young with the youth of that younger world.”

“How can we help it?” she said. “This miserable world of slaves from every race that lives close to us, and cheats and lies and talks wicked talk! No dull, ignorant boors, but clever, keen-witted Greeks and Syrians! How can we help learning evil from them? what can we do to become young again?”

“I am going among the young nations, my beloved,” he replied, “who are pouring in on our old Rome.”

“To fight them back!” she said.

“Perhaps also to learn from them,” he replied. “When I come back,*if* I come back, I will tell you what I have learned. Perhaps I shall find the Fountain of Youth, and drink of it, and come back young! And if I do, I will be sure to bring a cup of its precious waters for thee.”

CHAPTER IV.
A LETTER FROM ST. PATRICK TO HIS BROTHERS AND SONS.

hen the pirates had seized Ethne and Baithene, one sharp cry had rung through the glen from the faithful clansman who had been watching below, when a javelin hurled by one of the pirates had pierced his breast, and silenced him for ever. That cry, though unable to reach Ethne and Baithene, muffled as they were in their plaids, had alarmed the household. But, so sudden had been the attack, and so swiftly was the vessel rowed out of the creek, that she was well out at sea before a boat could be launched in pursuit. There were nothing but small river coracles at hand, and the British vessel soon distanced them, and was hopelessly lost sight of.

Even when they reached the opposite shore of the Irish Sea, the pirates still seemed in fear of pursuit, and hugged the shore by day, hiding in creeks, stowing their captives in caves and hollows of the rocks, and then sailing on by moonlight till they reached the southernmost coasts of Britain. At last they came to a creek with which they seemed familiar, carefully steering the vessel through narrow channels between the rocks into a little sandy cove. This cove was shut in by cliffs hollowed at one end into a wonderful series of lofty caverns leading one to another like halls of some palace of the sea-gods.

The sailors had not been rough with the young captives, partly because they were valuable property, partly because their own hearts were not destitute of pity. One especially, called Dewi, had shown them no little kindness (the same who had crossed himself in half-sympathetic, half-superstitious fear of risking the divine displeasure by kidnapping baptized Christians), and missed no opportunity of ministering to their comfort. Moreover, there was in Ethne a heavenly gentleness, and in Baithene an unconquerable good-nature and readiness to help, that won on the rough sailors in spite of themselves. Once, moreover, Dewi had been greatly moved, when he had all but lost his balance in shifting a sail, and Baithene had sprung up from the bottom of the boat, fettered as he was, and had saved him by a timely grasp of his clothes. Here in the strange halls of this sea-cave, for the first time the boy and girl were set free to ramble whither they would. The sides of the cove were quite precipitous, and the outermost of these vaulted palace-chambers opened on another wider bay, which could only be reached by a rocky staircase always carefully guarded. So it happened that the morning after their arrival the brother and sister were left at liberty to wander along the little sandy cove together, to bathe their feet and hands in the waves. They were children enough to enjoy it, and were watching the morning sunbeams dancing on the foaming crests, when in the distance a familiar sound fell on their ears.

“It is like our own Patrick’s bell!” said Ethne.

They listened in silence. It was certainly a bell, and a bell meant Christianity and Christian worship. The clear tones came to them softly, like the pulsations of a heart that loved them.

“It is calling them to the Eucharist of God!” Ethne said, with an awed voice. “There are Christians within reach.”

“Alas! are not these robbers Christians?” exclaimed Baithene.

“I suppose the loveliest things always have the falsest counterfeits,” said Ethne; “but these surely must be real Christians, gathered together to adore our Christ.”

And she knelt down on the sands, and almost for the first time since their capture burst into a passion of tears. Baithene knelt down beside her, and tried to soothe and comfort her. But she was already comforted. The glow of sacred hopes and memories had melted away the icy weight on her heart, or she could not have wept. Instinctively they were drawn towards the sacred sound, creeping noiselessly through the rocky halls, till through an opening like a little arched window they caught a glimpse of the sandy bay on the other side, and above it, on a sandy ridge, of a little building of rough-hewn stones, scarcely larger than the cabins near it, but distinguished by a low bell-tower, within which their friend the Christian bell was slowly swinging. It was a little church, afterwards for centuries buried in the sands.

More surprises awaited them that day. From their post at the rocky window they saw a congregation gather and disperse, and then some of them cluster round a man in a long dark robe, like a priest or a monk. Most of the congregation dispersed in various directions, but a few followed the monk straight across the sands to the cavern where they were; and, to their inexpressible delight, they heard from the lips of the strange priest words in their own Irish language. The voice drew nearer and nearer, and, hidden as they were in a dark recess of the cave, they distinctly caught the name of their own Patrick.

“Patrick the great bishop has sent me,” said the voice of the stranger, in the speech so familiar to them. “I have sought you across Britain, Coroticus and his followers, to fulfil my embassy; and at last I have found you, and you shall hear the message of the great bishop, the Apostle of the Irish.” Many of the sailors and armed followers of the expedition were gathered around, half awed by the solemn tones of the priest, half deriding. But they seemed so far spell-bound as to be constrained to listen. The letter was in Latin, which the men understood, being Britons, until lately under Roman sway, and, to their great satisfaction, Ethne and Baithene found they could also grasp his meaning well.

“‘I, Patrick,’” the priest began, reading from the parchment, “‘a sinner and unlearned, declare that I was made bishop in Ireland. I most certainly hold that it was from God I received what I am, and therefore for the love of God I dwell a pilgrim and an exile among a barbarous people. He is my witness that I speak the truth. It is not my wish to use language so harsh and so severe, but I am compelled by zeal for God and the truth of Christ, Who stirred me up for the love of my neighbours and sons, for whom I have given up country and parents, and am ready to give my life also, if I am worthy.’”

“He calls us his sons!” murmured the captives, “he has given up country and parents for us!”

“‘With my own hand I have written these words, to be delivered to the soldiers of Coroticus, no more my fellow-citizens, nor the fellow-citizens of the Roman saints, but fellow-citizens of demons, shedding the blood of innocent Christians, multitudes of whom I have begotten to God, and confirmed in Christ. Cruel slaughter and massacre was committed by them on some neophytes while still in their white robes the day after they had

been anointed with the chrism, while it was yet visible on their foreheads.'"

"Then there are others captured besides ourselves," groaned Baithene, "and some slain. Who? Shall we ever know?"

"'I sent a letter by a holy presbyter whom I taught from his infancy, accompanied by other clergymen, to entreat they would restore some of the baptized captives whom they had taken, but they turned them into ridicule. Therefore I know not for whom I should rather grieve, whether for those who were slain, or those whom they took captive, or those whom Satan so grievously ensnared, and who shall be delivered over like himself, to the eternal pains of hell; "for whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin, and the child of the devil." Wherefore let every one who fears God know that these strangers to me and to Christ my God, Whose ambassador I am, are parricides and fratricides. Wherefore I earnestly beseech those who are lowly and humble of heart, not to eat or drink with them or receive alms from them, until they repent with bitter tears, and make satisfaction to God, and set free those servants and baptized handmaids of Christ for whom He was crucified and died.

"'Avarice is a deadly crime. The Most High rejects the offerings of the unjust. He who offers a sacrifice from the substance of the poor, is like one who offers a son as a victim in the sight of his father. Do I show a true compassion for that nation which formerly took me captive? I was free born!'"

"Patrick understands captivity!" murmured Baithene. The voice of the priest had been ringing like a trumpet, now it deepened and softened.

"'Therefore I will cry aloud with sorrow and grief. Oh, most goodly, well-beloved brothers and sons, whom I have begotten in Christ, what shall I do for you?' Listen, beloved!" the priest interposed in words of his own, "if there be any of you within hearing, Patrick weeps for you as his brothers and sisters and sons. 'What shall I do for you?' he says. 'It is written, "Weep with them that do weep;" and again, "If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it." The Church weeps and laments her sons and daughters whom the sword of the enemy has not slain, but who have been carried away to far-off lands. These Christian free-men are sold and reduced to slavery. A crime has been committed which is horrible and unspeakable. I grieve, my well-beloved, for you and for myself. But at the same time I rejoice that I have not laboured in vain, and that my pilgrimage has not been in vain. Thanks be to God, ye, O believers and baptized ones, have departed from the world to Paradise. I behold you. Ye have begun your journey to that region where there shall be no night, nor sorrow, nor death any more. Ye therefore shall reign with the apostles and martyrs, and shall receive an everlasting kingdom.'" Then the priest's voice grew stern again. "'But where shall they find themselves who distribute among their depraved followers, baptized women and captive orphans, for the sake of a wretched earthly kingdom which passes away in a moment like a cloud, or like smoke scattered by the wind?'" Then his voice changed once more to a tone of appeal. "'But oh that God would inspire them, that at some time they might return unto Him! They have murdered the brothers of the Lord. But let them repent and release the baptized women whom they have already taken captive, that so they may be worthy to live to God, and be made whole here and for eternity.'" Then with the invocation of the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the voice of Patrick's ambassador ceased.

An angry murmur rose in the cave, and then there were mocking cries, and spears were pointed at the priest. No captives were allowed to be seen, and at last he turned sorrowfully away. But the message had reached three hearts that were in sore need of it.

"Patrick cares for us! he calls us his brothers and sisters. He is our shepherd, our brother, our father!" said Ethne.

"Patrick also was once a captive and a slave!" murmured Baithene.

"And Patrick," Ethne replied, "has lived to serve and to liberate those who enslaved him, and to be their saviour and friend, like his Lord."

And before the sun of that Sunday night had set, their friend the sailor Dewi contrived to get near them, as they strayed with the deer-hound along the little inner cove, now reduced by the high tide to a narrow strip of sand.

"The voice of Patrick has reached one at least of those it was meant to reach," Dewi said, in a low, tremulous voice. "One of us at least repents at last. Never again will Dewi help to rob and murder the brothers and sisters of Patrick, and of our Lord Christ. Children," he concluded, "what can I do for you?"

"What can any one do for us?" said Baithene, despondingly.

But Ethne took the sailor's rough hands and clasped them in her own.

"You can do this for us," she said, "the best service any can render us now. Go back to Ireland and tell our people, tell Patrick the bishop, we are alive! And find our father, Conan, chief of the O'Neills, and our mother, if they are still alive, and tell them about us."

"I will try, lady," he said. "If I fail, you will know it was not for want of trying. But the country of your kindred is, and ought to be, as a den of lions for any of our band."

"I know!" she said. "But I know you would like to have something hard and dangerous to do for us."

"You know the truth," said Dewi, with quivering lips. "And if I can, I will come back and hunt you out again, and bring news of your own to you."

"We shall be lonelier and more friendless than ever when you are gone," Ethne said.

"They do not want me any further," Dewi said. "Just now I heard them say they have other Irish captives in other vessels further south, who are to be joined to-morrow. And they have hired new sailors who know this coast. For it is a perilous coast, beset by rocks and shoals and narrow channels between islands full, they say, of savage people."

"Where are they taking us?" Baithene asked.

"To Gaul, I believe. There are men of our race there who speak our language."

"And then?"

"To Rome, they say. To the great Court of the Empire and mart of the world. They have a good cargo: gold ornaments of great price among the Irish plunder, copper and tin from the ancient mines in this west country, and a goodly troop of captives."

"To Rome!" exclaimed Baithene. "To the great slave-market!"

And Dewi could not deny that this was their destination.

The brother and sister slept little that night.

“I longed and prayed to go to Rome, sister. And *some one* must have heard me! Can it be the Friend or the Enemy? For there *is* an Enemy, you know. We renounced him at our baptism, and no doubt he will do us all the harm he can. And he is strong, they say. It would seem, sometimes, nearly as strong as God!”

“He is *weak*, they told us!” replied Ethne. “He can only hurt people who give themselves up to him and are cowards. And, brother,” she added, after a long silence, “a beautiful thing has come back into my mind. One of the priests (I think it was Patrick) was speaking to our mother about prayer. He said we must tell all our wants to God. But mother said, ‘How could we dare? we know so little, and we might ask for the wrong thing.’ But he told her, God never gives wrong things when His children ask for them, any more than she would. And then he told her a story about a great saint, I think he was called Paul, who prayed that he might go to Rome; and God heard him, and he *went* to Rome, but shipwrecked and a prisoner.”

“What comfort is there in that melancholy story, Ethne? It is exactly what I am afraid of!” Baithene said gloomily.

“Do you think the great Paul did not know what he was asking, or the good God what He was giving?” she said. “Hear the end of my story. In his prison in Rome Paul gathered together crowds of people who came to listen to him. And many of them became Christians. And,” she added, after a pause, “in the end he died a martyr at Rome. And *that*, you know, is the greatest death, they say, that any Christian can die.”

“But that Paul wished to go to Rome to do good,” said Baithene, “to serve his people and God.”

“And so did you, darling,” she replied; “and God has heard.”

“I did not exactly wish to be a martyr,” he replied, “at least not quite yet. I do not feel fit for it. And I did want to learn Latin, and so many things, and to do so many things.”

“Ah,” she said, “I suppose we none of us quite know when we are fit to be martyrs. And, darling, do *I* want you to be a martyr? God has many good things to let us be besides that. The Church would scarcely get on if all her noblest were to be martyrs, nor the world either, could it?”

“Patrick did come back; and he saved the people who might have martyred him, which seems almost better in some ways,” Baithene rejoined, more cheerfully.

“But Patrick *forgave* first, and I suppose that is what we have to do now,” said Ethne.

“Is it?” replied Baithene, with some hesitation. “That scarcely seems much easier than being a martyr.”

CHAPTER V.
ONCE MORE THROUGH WRECK TO ROME.

t seemed almost like a second exile to Ethne and Baithene when they left the lofty caverns of that rocky sea-palace, and missed the familiar sound of the matin-bell coming across the sands; and when they lost sight of Dewi, their one friend, standing on a point of rock and watching the boat as long as it could be seen. They had great need of their new faith; and the anchor held, although they took their religion differently, according to their character.

For Baithene it was a commission to conquer circumstances and so reign over them, king of himself, if of nothing else, like the Stoics, with the inspiring addition of the patience being the patience of hope, and the conviction that in ruling himself he served the King Who ruled the nations and the ages.

For Ethne it was a talisman to redeem and save, to save by loving, to redeem by forgiving, like Patrick; a link with every human creature she met, not of thought merely but of life, of kindred, through the Divine Christ Who had redeemed all mankind and is Himself man. Whatever untruth men thought, she felt the truth they did not think remained; whatever evil men did, the evil could be turned into good for the sufferers by love and faith, and for the wrong-doers by the forgiving patience which might win them to repent.

Therefore, sad and dark as their life might be, it could never be empty or unmeaning, because of the quenchless hope of this Christian faith, because of the life-giving power of the living Christ. Life was not a mere tangle of twisted lines, decorative or chaotic; it was a sacred inscription which God could read if they could not, for He was writing it; which one day, when they had learned His language, they also would be able to read.

They needed all the comfort they could find, for their lives were dark enough, smitten down from such a height to such a depth, driven out from such a warmth of love into such an icy cold of cruelty and injustice, driven out into an unloving world at one of its darkest moments. Happily for them they had all the gaiety and pleasantness of youth and of their race, enabling them to find amusement in incongruities even when most uncomfortable, and to make things pleasant and easy to others by word and deed whenever this was possible. Moreover, they had the birthright and training of their rank in their own little world. Being quick-witted, they learned soon enough that it had been a little world; and that it was quite useless, and would bring them nothing but ridicule, to insist on their dignities. Nevertheless the natural dignity and grace of their station remained, and, not being asserted, made itself felt: a kind of royal way of recognizing little services, of avoiding neglects or hasty words, which they had been used to feel might give pain; a kind of princely indifference as to slights or rudenesses, which they had been used to think could only spring from ignorance or want of breeding; an innate sense of something within themselves that could not be changed by outward changes, which made any menial thing they had to do seem not so much a degradation as a condescension; a royal consideration for others which fitted well into the high humility of their Christian calling. There is a good deal of education in the fact of being royal, if the lesson is learnt the right way.

So it happened, that by the time the rough voyage from Cornwall to Armorican Brittany was over, the young captives had won the hearts of many of the crew, who tried to lighten their bondage; and not a few were sorry to part with the brave, bright boy and the fair, sweet maiden; and were moved to a tender, reverent pity when they had once more to be fettered and guarded, and led away among the file of slaves to the market at the port at the mouth of the Loire, where the ship was to end her voyage and unlade her living merchandise.

But these two had still each other, and also Bran, the great deer-hound, who had established his claim to be with them by making it plain he would be the death of any one who tried to part them, whilst he was obedient to the slightest touch or softest word from them, especially from Ethne, whose guardianship he assumed as the representative of the whole clan O'Neill.

It was some solace to the brother and sister to hear around them, when they landed, a language resembling their own. But it was a motley company which gathered round the little captive band, no strange or unwonted sight then in any European seaport. "Prisoners and captives" came into the petitions of every Litany during those tumultuous times. Their ransoms were among the perpetual claims of the alms-giving of every church. "I was in prison, and ye came unto Me," meant much in days when the prisoners were often no dangerous criminals or idle vagabonds, but innocent children, or high-born youths and maidens such as Baithene and Ethne.

As they stood there, a gazing-stock for the idle crowd always loafing about quays and unloading vessels, Ethne felt their rude jests and insolent staring the worst things they had yet experienced; and there was a wonderful comfort for her in the loyal worship in Bran the dog's eyes, as he nestled his great shaggy head against her knee and looked wistfully up into her face. It brought into her eyes healing tears, which to his surprise fell on his head, and made him lay his paw on her arm with grave, sympathetic remonstrance.

Baithene, on the contrary, faced the crowd, feeling every inch a king, in lofty indifference to anything the low rabble could look or say; he had never felt so princely, at least as regarded himself.

As he stood thus at bay, two figures, a man and a woman, detached themselves from the crowd, two faces were directed towards him and his sister with absorbing interest. They were of a different type to any Baithene had seen before: the man's forehead was lofty though somewhat narrow, and further contracted by lines which seemed rather grooves worn by care than fruitful furrows of thought; the eyes were dark and deep-set, with flashes like the flicker of a fire in the depths of a cavern; the lips were prominent and expressive; the nose was aquiline, yet the whole countenance, if in any way eagle-like, was like an eagle's in the eager intensity of its penetrating gaze, rather than in any look of power and command; and from time to time a pathetic and kindly expression passed over his face, especially when he turned toward the woman beside him, in response to any word or look from her. Her face, though of the same type as his, was softened into a refined beauty: the brow was in proportion wider; the eyes, though deep-set, were full of a gracious and tender light; the mouth, varying in expression, though not moulded into the Greek curves of Cupid's bow, had in its greater fullness and longer lines a power and sweetness which did not need a smile to make you feel its sympathetic response. She made Baithene think of his own mother, and of the Mother they had learnt to think of as the type of all true maidenhood and motherhood combined. The complexion of both was darker than Baithene had seen, with a darkness that seemed to belong to the fire of more southern suns than he had known; not the mere fading or dimming as of the fair faces of the North, but rich with an original and mellow colour of its

own. Both had hair black as the raven's wing. Their dress also was slightly different from anything Baithene was accustomed to. Round the man's head were twisted folds of coloured linen; from the woman's fell a veil of creamy white gathered gracefully round her throat and shoulders.

As he looked, the two came forward, and at a signal to one of their British captors a conversation began which the brother and sister felt was an eager bargaining for their purchase.

The Briton seemed to be insisting on their being sold in one lot—maiden, youth, and dog. The stranger, on the other hand, seemed to be endeavouring to separate them, apparently saying, not so much "*It is nought*," as "I *have* nought, or at least nothing equivalent to the value of the three together." Unpleasant at it was to be thus haggled for, Baithene had a sense that the bargaining was more diplomatic than sincere. And at last, when the two dark-haired foreigners were turning away, and the British sailor laid his hands on Baithene and the dog to separate them from the maiden, the two turned back; and between the determination of the deer-hound and the pitifulness of the woman, the bargain was soon completed—Bran having expressed his opinion as to parting from Ethne in a way the British captor, remembering Dewi with "his leg bitten to the bone," did not care to have repeated; whilst the dark-eyed woman, in a very unbusiness-like way, clasped the hands of both sister and brother appealingly in her own.

So it came about that Ethne, Baithene, and the dog were led away from the slave-market by the two strangers, the British sailor following to receive at their own home the stipulated coins, which the old man would not on any account display in public.

The dwelling of the strangers was in a remote corner of the city, with no appearance of wealth about it; and the purchaser seemed to draw the coins required reluctantly and with difficulty from a very limited store. The purchase, however, was duly completed, to the great relief of the captives, who might have been less reassured if they had heard the last words of the seller, when, after departing, he returned and said in a low voice to the buyer, "Only promise me one thing—that you will not *eat* these children!"

"*Eat* them!" was the indignant retort; "we are no Tartar savages."

"Nevertheless," was the sceptical reply, "I have heard a terrible story of some countrymen of yours who were driven out of a city in the far east for killing and eating a Christian child at some feast of theirs. If thou wilt solemnly promise me not to eat them," he added (a spark of conscience suddenly flickering up from the ashes of his faith), "I will give thee back a hundredth part of the price." And he held out some coins in his hand.

The purchaser made a gesture as if he would have flung the money in the sailor's face, but the habit of his life gained the victory over his patriotic indignation.

"To reassure thy conscience, dog of a pirate," he said contemptuously, satisfying at once his patriotism with an Oriental epithet and his ruling passion with the coin, "I promise to deal better with them than thou hast, at the worst."

So the bargain was effected, and the purchaser re-entered his house. He solaced himself, however, for the insult by saying suddenly to his wife—

"A profitable bargain, truly, thou hast made for me! What are we to do with this Gentile boy and maiden? The lowest Christians will resent our owning or selling one of themselves. And, moreover," he added, with unfeigned disgust, "what are we to do with this unclean beast? It would be as safe to have a lion in the house, and as pleasant to have one of Samson's foxes."

"These creatures sell for their weight in gold, the sailor said, to the nobles of Ravenna or Constantinople, for the chase. They are afraid of nothing, and will bring down any wild beast, stag, or wolf, or bear."

"The Unutterable grant he do not bring us down first," he replied, encountering with much uneasiness the pricked-back ears and fully-displayed teeth of the deer-hound, emphasized as these were by a low growl, decidedly trying to the hospitality of the master of the house.

But Ethne's arm was instantly around the dog and her hand on his head; and the wistful eyes looked up to her with a tender recognition of her tenderness, though accompanied by an evident distrust of her experience of the world.

Of his hostess Bran showed no such disapproval. He even suffered her to lay her hand gently on his mistress's shoulder. There was little communication possible at first between them, except by such touches and looks, the imperfect Latin of the captives not being very comprehensible; whilst the language of the strangers, though possessing gutturals, nasals, and lispings not unlike their own, had no real resemblance to it.

The woman soon began to spread a meal for them at two separate tables, both carefully laid, with basins of water for washing the hands, and a towel, and well-prepared though simple food—bread and fruit, and wine of the country.

A sense came over the brother and sister of being welcomed once more in a home, and recognized as human creatures, not mere chattels; and they partook of the simple fare with the enjoyment of welcome guests and hungry children. There was a lifting up of hands and eyes in prayer and benediction before and after the meal.

When it was finished, the hostess cleared the tables, spread them again with food and drink, and made everything ready for the night in the sleeping-rooms. Then she carefully unpacked from the chest a silver candlestick with seven branches, and filled the seven lamps with oil, which when the sun set she lighted and set on their own table, the only decoration of the house. After this she sat down and elaborately did nothing, in a way which was evidently significant of some rite or festivity. Then after a time they stood up, and the host said prayers in the strange, deep-sounding language, whilst the captives watched their proceedings with much wonder and interest. It seemed to Ethne they must have fallen among some new variety of Christians. And yet with all the compassionate kindness of their hostess, they were evidently considered as apart from all these religious ceremonials, as well as excluded from sitting at the same table, whether as slaves and inferiors, or as of another race, or as in some way excommunicate, they could not quite determine.

It was a relief to them both when they were allowed to go into a walled orchard at the back of the house, where, for the first time since the memorable evening in the cave, by the many-chambered cavern, before the reading of Patrick's letter, they were once more alone together.

They discussed their mysterious purchasers in low tones, but could arrive at no clear conclusion. Of one thing, however, they felt more and more clear, from what Dewi had told them, from chance words that had dropped from the other sailors, and the recurrence of the magic name "Roma," as the only intelligible word in the conversation of their hosts—they were on their way to Rome.

They slept the sound sleep of youth on the clean straw couches spread for them in one of the sleeping-chambers. When they awoke it had long been daylight, and their hosts were sitting in the eating-room, again elaborately doing nothing, with a seriousness which made Ethne and Baithene

feel the immobility and stillness in some mysterious way part of a sacred ritual. Their only occupation was the reading aloud of their host from a manuscript wrapped in silken covers, with occasional responses from their hostess.

They were courteously bidden to take their places at the meal set on their own table. But when they had finished they felt they would be better out of the way in the orchard, to which they gladly retired, enjoying the sunshine and rest.

Whilst they were there, from within the house came frequently the sound of the monotonous reading or chanting, in that same strange language, with its deep guttural or nasal sounds.

“Are we not in a Christian country?” said Baithene at last; “and can this be our sacred day, Sunday, the day of our Lord?”

They tried to count back from that day to the day when they had heard the bell from the cavern, and had seen the Christian congregation gather and disperse at the little church on the sandy hill. But they could not make the sevens count right. They seemed always landed in the last day before the sacred first day of the week.

“And there are no bells,” said Ethne meditatively. “Perhaps we are not in a Christian country after all.”

“There seem to be so many kinds of men and races and languages in the world,” replied Baithene; “and also,” he added, “so many kinds of Christians; it is very difficult to understand.”

At eventide there was another ceremonial, which seemed to close the day, as the lighting of the lamps had begun it.

The hostess took out of the chest another evidently sacred and cherished treasure, a perforated silver box of sweet, fragrant spices, which they smelt, and with this they perfumed the room. The sweet aromatic scent reached to where the captives were among the fruit-trees. After that the silver treasures are again carefully wrapped up and packed into the chest with the parchment manuscripts, folded in costly, gold-embroidered Oriental silks.

Then the hostess came and bade the youth and maiden inside, and prepared for them an abundant and tempting meal, such as it was long since they had tasted; and the host went out into the city.

Her manner became much more frank and cordial when she was alone with her guests. All day, whenever they were together, Ethne had noticed the soft, dark eyes following her with an intense expression of wistful inquiry; and when the old man came back and took Baithene out with him, the hostess laid her head on Ethne’s shoulder and burst into tears, sobbing out one name, “My Rachel! my Rachel!”

And so it came about, that between broken Latin and Irish, and the universal human speech of sorrow and pity, through eyes and tender touches (how neither of them could ever explain), the two women came to understand that one had lost a daughter as the other a mother, and that each had much need of the other, and both would try, in such measure as they could, to comfort one another.

The dog also understood and accepted the hostess as a clanswoman, and was ready to lavish on her more attentions of caressing tongue and paws than for some reason not comprehended by him or by Ethne she felt free to accept.

CHAPTER VI.
"MOVING ABOUT IN WORLDS NOT REALIZED."

o Baithene's surprise and pleasure, he found himself, as he followed his purchaser through the lanes and streets of the little Armorican seaport at the mouth of the Loire, frequently catching words and sounds familiar to him. The people were Celts, Bretons, and though their dialect differed from that of the O'Neills, he understood enough to know what they were talking about. In the course of the morning's walk he was able to be of much use to his master by interpreting for him in the bargains which he was always endeavouring to make for skins, garments, gold and silver vessels and ornaments, or viands for the table, always apparently himself on the verge of bankruptcy, yet always contriving by some means to secure the best to be had.

Baithene did not enjoy this haggling, and not seldom threw in a word in aid of the seller, but nevertheless his pleasant face and frank good-humour assisted the old man, so that they became quite confidential and friendly.

In the course of these commercial arrangements which absorbed his companion, Baithene became gradually aware of a weight of terror and apprehension brooding like a thunder-cloud over the town.

"Let the old fellow have it for what he will," one of the sellers grumbled, as he took the coin for a splendid purple-bordered mantle which must have belonged to some Roman of rank, "coin is easier to carry than raiment, and we are all on the march. Who knows how soon these savage Huns will be upon us!"

"At all events," muttered another dressed like a peasant, "Roman purple will not be worth anything much longer here. It is better to be dashed about by these wild Huns, than to be ground down steadily under the heavy chariot-wheels of the Roman tax-gatherers. We, 'the Bagaudæ,[1] the mob, as the proud patricians call us, shall have our revenge at last."

"What do you say?" replied an armed Goth, angrily. "Do you mean that the reports are true that the Bagaudæ, the rebel peasants, called in the Huns?"

"How do I know?" was the reply. "Eudoxius, the good Roman physician, certainly had pity on our wrongs, and went, it is said, to Attila's camp. And Attila is here."

"Here!" was the retort; "scarcely here yet, nor likely to be, if Aetius the great General, and Theodoric the Ostrogoth, make up their quarrel and fight the Huns."

"I know little," was the sullen answer; "but what does it matter to us? Whoever wins, in all the battles we are still the mob, to die and starve, and be driven and beaten. One thing, however," he concluded, "we will not do; we will not fight for any of them."

And the peasant turned away among his companions. But the merchant was deep in an especially keen bit of bargaining, so that Baithene had leisure to continue listening to what these Celtic peasants of his own race were saying to each other. And in all their talk two names were perpetually recurring, entirely new to him—"the Huns" and "Attila." The Huns were spoken of as a fierce horde of savages, to whom all the other barbarians were as men to wild beasts; fierce heathen all of them, although more bent on plunder than on persecution; however, they had occasionally proved their heathenism by burning alive in a mass those who refused to worship their idols. Moreover, they were said to be ugly as monkeys, with small, deep-set, piercing eyes, wide mouths, and flattened snub noses; short of stature and hunch-backed; from infancy accustomed to be on horseback, till they became a kind of monstrous centaurs. In short, they were thought by many not to be men at all, not descended from Adam, or Odin, but from demons and witches. With no houses or homes, they were a nation of vagabonds, a horde ofwarriors, always travelling on horseback or in wagons, men, women, and children, making and building nothing, only ravaging and destroying. This was the multitude which was rushing like a sand-storm over all the land. And now this wild mob had been organized into a terrible machine of destruction in the hands of a king whose name was uttered in a terrified whisper, as if he could hear everywhere and see every one, as the name of a mighty demon, or dark god of the under-world: Attila, king of the Huns.

He had laid waste the Belgic land and Northern Gaul, ravaged the fertile fields into a desert, taken what food he needed for his hosts, and then destroyed the rest; taken what plunder he could from the cities, and then massacred the people and burned the towns to the ground. From Worms, Cologne, Trèves, Metz, Cambrai, Rheims, came the cry of ruin. The fugitives crowded all the old Roman roads, and hid in the forests. And now it was rumoured that he was sweeping on to their own river, the Loire, and threatening to destroy Orleans.

It became evident to Baithene that he and Ethne were not the only wronged and plundered creatures in the world. The whole world seemed a chaos, no one safe, no one at rest, none trusting or helping another.

When the merchant's last bargain was accomplished, Baithene returned to Ethne with a heart full of wonder and horror, and yet with a kind of sustaining sense of being rather a soldier on a universal battle-field than a solitary fugitive, hunted homeless through a world of homes.

There was much to tell Ethne when they were once more alone together on their couches of heather and hay, in their own little sleeping-chamber.

"The heather is sweet," said Ethne, always finding something pleasant to speak of. "It smells like our Ireland, like home."

"There is no home," sighed Baithene; "there are no homes in the world. It is all a desert, a ruin, a wreck."

"Patrick's people always told us we were only on a journey here on earth," Ethne replied. "'Pilgrims' they called us; but that must mean that we are travelling to a temple, that there *is* a home somewhere."

Baithene unfolded to her all his tidings of the miseries of the world; of the exacting Roman tax-gatherers; the oppressed rebel peasants; of Attila and the Huns. "And," he concluded, "we are to be hunted about through it all as the slaves of an old miser, who would bargain for a crust with a

starving beggar in a burning city."

But Ethne had seen the world and the old man and woman from a very different point of view that day, and was full of pity and hope.

She must have found her Latin vocabulary more extensive than she thought, or the hostess must have had some secret stock of Celtic,—she had lived amongst well-nigh every tribe and kindred and nation, and there were Celts, she said, in Asia,—for by some means these two had come to a marvellous amount of comprehension of each other's histories and characters.

"He is not only a miser, Baithene," she replied, in refutation of his dark apprehensions, "he was of a princely house like our own, even more ancient it would almost seem, if that could be," she added, with a loyal faith in her Irish pedigree; "for," she concluded in a low voice, "I have found out who they are. You remember Patrick always called the sacred books 'the Testaments of God.' There are two Testaments of God. There is the Old, and there is the New, which has much better and more glorious things in it because it has the Christ. But these people belong to the Old, which is also from God, and has also certainly excellent things in it; it was this they were reading yesterday in the great roll with the black letters. I remember Patrick's people told us that our Lord Christ Himself read wonderful things out of it, about healing the broken-hearted, and setting at liberty those that were bound. Perhaps, brother," she exclaimed, with a sudden flash as of discovery, "it was *that* they were reading! Certainly my heart *was* rather broken, and she has been very healing to me. His name is Eleazar; her name is Mariam, or Miriam, like the very best name of all, the name of the Blessed Mother. Perhaps it is the very same," and her voice lowered, "for they are indeed of a very ancient and honourable race; perhaps, if that were possible, more honourable as well as more ancient than our own. They are of the very nation and people of the Lord Christ Himself."

"The people of the Lord Christ crucified Him!" replied Baithene, not easily able to believe much good of his bargaining host, "and one of them betrayed and sold Him."

"Patrick said it was the Romans who crucified Him," said Ethne.

"Perhaps," he replied; "but His own people sold Him to the Romans, that they might crucify Him, which was baser still, and just what this Eleazar might have done—sold Him for thirty pieces of silver. I can fancy now how Judas counted them out, and rang them on the floor to be sure it was good money."

"Ah, but, Baithene," she said, "I know much more about Eleazar. He did not always love money best. They had one dear little girl; Miriam says I remind her of the child. Her eyes were dark, but she says, though mine are grey, they look at her with a look just like her Rachel's. She was very young when she was taken from them, only twelve years old."

"But what has that to do with Eleazar's love of money?" asked Baithene. "If their only child is dead, what is the good of money to these two?"

"That is the point of the whole," replied Ethne. "Rachel is not dead. That is to say, they are quite sure she is not dead, they have prayed so much for her, that they may meet her again on earth. And Miriam has had visions and dreams of seeing her, has felt the child's kiss on her lips, and been waked by it more than once. There was a massacre of their people at some city far away in Asia, and Rachel was torn from them and sold into bondage, like ourselves, brother. And they are always travelling all over the world to try and find her. And they are quite sure they will one day, and it is this that makes Miriam so kind to captive maidens, especially to me."

"But why, after all, does this make Eleazar so fond of money?" said Baithene.

"Oh, don't you see? he is always heaping it up for his Rachel; that when they find her they may ransom her at any price, and give her dainties and clothes and jewels, and every good thing in the world, to make up to her for all she must have suffered."

"Poor dear people!" said Baithene, touched to pity at last. "But what a dream and a delusion! how can they ever find her in this great wilderness of a world? or how would they know her if they did, after all these years, or she them? And, besides, what possible use could all this money be to her, or to any one in the midst of all this ruin, and wreck, and battle? The more possessions the more peril. If the Huns knew of all the treasure, they would be sure to torture Eleazar and Miriam till they gave it up, and then to kill them lest they should bargain any of it back again."

"I know," replied Ethne gravely, "and so does Miriam, but it would be cruel to undeceive the old man. This money-grubbing and money-heaping is his one link to life and love. It is country to him, and home, and child, and hope."

Baithene sighed and smiled.

"Little sister," he exclaimed tenderly, "I believe you would find an excuse for Judas and his thirty pieces of silver!"

She crossed herself.

"There is always the Blessed Lord's excuse for every one," she said; "*they know not what they do*. Perhaps even Judas did not quite."

"Certainly this poor, mad Eleazar does not," Baithene replied, with a kind of grim pity, "and you need not fear that I shall try to open his eyes, or to open any one's eyes to his possessing the treasure."

"It is hidden away very safely, Miriam says; not even she knows where. Most of it probably in Rome, or some safe place, away from the Huns, where we are going."

"*Is* Rome safe from the Huns?" he said doubtfully.

"I do not know about the Huns," she replied, "that is all so new. The Goths and the Celts seem to be leaving Rome alone just now."

There was a pause. They were becoming sleepy. But before they settled to slumber Baithene said—

"Do they know anything of the other Testament of God? Do they believe in Christ our Lord?"

"I am afraid not," she replied sorrowfully, "at all events not Eleazar. You see, it was the Christians who robbed him of his child."

"But Miriam?" he asked.

"When I spoke to her of Him," Ethne replied, "she said He seemed to have been very good, not like most Christians. She did even say hesitatingly and timidly, looking round as if she were afraid her husband might hear, that she sometimes wished their people could have understood how good He was, and what He was, in time; it might, she thought, have made everything different; but now it seemed too late for them."

"It is never too late, in this life, at least. You remember Patrick says so in that letter we heard in the cave; not even for apostate Christians, he

said; not even for Coroticus and those wicked pirates, who slew or kidnapped Patrick's newly-baptized sons and daughters, and us among them."

"Let us say the Lord's Prayer together," said Ethne, "and try to put Coroticus and Eleazar and their trespasses into it, with all the rest."

They rose and knelt hand in hand, and prayed, and then lay down again and fell asleep.

CHAPTER VII.
TOURS AND HER SAINT.

n a few days, at early dawn, the journeys of Baithene and Ethne began again.

Eleazar hired a boat, and they went up the Loire to the city of Tours, where they landed.

This was the first city the captives had ever seen, and it impressed them greatly; the high walls, the tall houses, the villas of the Roman officials and rich citizens, in which it was set as if in a cluster of gems. They wondered how much more magnificent the great Rome itself could be. They were still among people of their own race, and language not quite unfamiliar was around them; but being on the south side of the river, in the kingdom of Theodoric, the Visigoth, the town had escaped the ravages of the other Gothic tribes, and also, now, of the Huns in northern and eastern Gaul. There, also for the first time, they saw a cathedral, the only sacred building they had yet beheld having been the round cell of hewn stones in Ireland, and the little chapel with the bell-tower on the sandy shore in Cornwall.

It was Friday evening when they arrived, and again the ritual of the Jewish Sabbath began in Eleazar's home with the lighting of the seven-branched candlestick, and ended with the fragrance of the spices from the silver box, and the reading from the Hebrew manuscript. This Miriam had explained to Ethne. It was a thanksgiving to God for creating all sweet and pleasant things, a consecration of beauty, and a diffusion, symbolically, of the fragrance of the rest and worship of the Sabbath through the week. The words of the thanksgiving were, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who createst diverse kinds of spice, and all sweet and pleasant things."

The next day Miriam and Eleazar remained at home, and the brother and sister were suffered to go together round the city. It was understood they were prisoners on parole; that day, therefore, was a memorable holiday to them.

Their first expedition was to the cathedral. It was still early morning when they entered. The loftiness of the vaulted roof, the vastness of the dimly-lighted spaces, the lights at the altar, the rich dresses of the officiating priests, the sweet and solemn singing of the choir, struck them with such awe and wonder, that they did not venture more than a few steps beyond the porch. Then, seeing the font, they felt that this at least belonged to them; that there they had the children's right to stay; and they knelt down close beside it, and reverently crossing themselves, lifted up their hearts in prayer.

It was an early Mass, and when it was finished, and the congregation dispersed, the youth and maiden still knelt on beside the font.

In one of the chapels there was a tomb which seemed to receive much honour. Many of the worshippers paused beside it as they went out, and knelt there a few minutes in prayer. But when the last of the people had left, and the acolytes had finished their last services at the altar, and the brother and sister were left alone, they still lingered on. It felt more home-like to them than any place they had been in since they were swept away from their own Irish shores. It was indeed to them the Father's house; and it was delightful to them to be together there for a while, quite alone. Ethne felt as if their mother might step in at any moment, with the radiant look she had on her face when she rose from the baptismal waters at Tara.

At last an aged monk came in, and went straight up to the tomb where so many had knelt. After a time they went up and knelt beside him. When he arose he looked kindly at them, and spoke to them in Latin, to which they responded as best they could. He evidently perceived at once that they were foreigners, and tried them with two or three languages; but they only shook their heads in perplexity, until, to their unspeakable delight, he said a few words in some Celtic tongue resembling their own, enough for them to understand and answer.

"You are from the Britanniæ," he said. "I have been there with the holy bishops Germanus of Auxerre and Lupus of Troyes, to combat the Pelagian heresy;" and with some anxiety he asked, "You are not Pelagians?"

They had never heard of the Pelagian heresy, which was at all events negatively satisfactory. But when he asked them from which of the seven provinces of Britain they came, he found they did not know anything about the seven provinces of Britain, which perplexed him not a little.

"Whence then do you come?"

"From the island beyond Britain," Baithene replied; and he added with a mixture of apology and pride, "From the island the Romans never conquered."

"A heathen land!" exclaimed the monk, with some agitation. "How come you then to be Christians?"

For he had seen them make the sign of the Cross, and make it in the orthodox Latin way. The sign of the Cross had significance in more than one way, then, as the sound of church bells and many other symbols.

They told him about Patrick, and by degrees a light came into his face. He had heard a rumour of some new mission in that wild, far-off island, and also a rumour that the missionary bishop was in some way connected with their own sainted bishop, Martin of Tours. This he told them, and also that it was by the tomb of St. Martin they were standing. Both of their faces grew radiant at this new link with Patrick and home. Ethne knelt down again beside the tomb, and pressed her lips to the cold marble as if it had been a mother's hand.

The monk questioned them about themselves, and listened with tender interest and strong indignation to their story.

"Kidnapped by Christians, and sold to a Jew!" he exclaimed, in a climax of horror. "In our Martin's time we would have ransomed you at once at any price, if we had had to sell the vessels of the altar for it, as the blessed old man did himself when his young deacon moved too slowly to fulfil his bidding; in his impetuous eagerness taking off his own sacerdotal robe when he was about to celebrate Mass, and throwing it around a wretched, naked beggar! Just as in his eager youth, when he was a soldier, he had cut his military cloak in two to give it to a beggar at Amiens!"

They listened eagerly. That was indeed a saint worth hearing about.

The old monk was launched on an endless subject when he began with St. Martin.

“But, alas!” he sighed in conclusion, “times are changed. The ravages of the barbarians and the exactions of the Romans have impoverished us all; and now the frightful hordes of these savage Huns may be on us any day. Perhaps also we are poorer in ourselves; we care more for the splendour of our churches than for the poverty of our brothers. We want Martin’s poverty of spirit to make us rich as Martin to help and save. We want his love and faith before we can see the visions he saw. Have you ever heard of them? of how, in the night, he saw our Lord among His angels, clothed in the garment he had given the beggar, and heard Him say to them, ‘Know ye who has thus arrayed Me? My servant Martin!’” Then seeing the intense interest in their eyes, the old monk said—“Would you come and see the hovel where Martin lived?”

They followed him eagerly to a collection of huts and cells between the river and the cliffs, where, like the monks in Egypt and the East, he and many of his brethren still lived in community, but in separate caves and cells. And there he showed them Martin’s wooden hut, still carefully preserved.

“Here the saint lived and prayed,” he said. “And here, as some think, he had the loveliest vision of all.”

Then they listened with rapt attention, as he told how, “while Martin was praying in his cell, the Evil Spirit stood before him, clad in a glittering radiancy, by this purposing the more easily to deceive him; clad also in royal robes with a golden jewelled diadem, with shoes covered with gold, with serene face and bright looks, so as to seem nothing so little as what he was. Martin at first was dazzled by the sight, and for a long time both kept silence. At length the Evil One began. ‘Acknowledge,’ he said, ‘O Martin, whom thou seest. I am Christ. I am now descending on earth, and I wished first to manifest myself to thee.’ Martin still kept silence and made no answer. The Devil still continued to repeat his bold pretence. ‘Martin, why hesitate to believe, when thou seest I am Christ?’ Then Martin understood, by the revelation of the Spirit, that itwas the Evil One and not God; and answered—‘Jesus the Lord said not He would come in glittering clothing and radiant with a diadem. I will not believe that the Christ is come save in that form in which He suffered; save with the wounds of the Cross.’ At these words the Evil One vanished in smoke, leaving a horrible, hellish stench and fumes behind him.”

The old man would have kept them till nightfall, but they felt bound in honour to return. Before they left the cells he gave them two small tablets, as letters of commendation to Anianus, Bishop of Orleans, and Lupus, Bishop of Troyes, who would, he said, be sure to help them if possible. “But,” he added, in a desponding tone, “who knows whether Anianus and Lupus will be still living? or their cities, Orleans and Troyes, still standing? From all sides come the news of this army of locusts, these myriads of monstrous savages, ravaging and burning and destroying. Surely the end of the world is at hand. Yet these tablets may do you service; keep them carefully.” And Ethne wrapped them in the folds of her plaid.

The old monk accompanied them to the door of Eleazar’s lodging.

“Kidnapped by Christians, purchased by a Jew!” he murmured, as he turned reluctantly away and left them. “Would to God our Martin were here!”

Miriam received them affectionately, and not without a look of triumph at her husband, who had not been sure they would ever return. Ethne was somewhat perplexed at the good monk’s last words.

“Why should we wish to call Martin down again?” she said. “Do not the saints always go on helping us in heaven? And does not God go on making saints on earth?”

“I wonder if we shall ever find a living saint again on earth!” said Baithene.

And Ethne returned to her “lorica,” her breastplate, Patrick’s Irish hymn—

“Christ in the
chariot;
Christ in the ship;
Christ behind me;
Christ before me;
Christ within me;
Christ above me.”

CHAPTER VIII.
FROM ROME TO THE BATTLE-FIELD.

he morning after his conversation with Lucia on the way from the catacombs, Marius went on his way northward. Away from the corruption and lassitude of the Imperial Court, then resident for a time at Rome; away from the decrepitude of Rome itself; from the luxurious idleness of life among the rich in their palaces, among their thousands of slaves; from the beggarly idleness of the pauperized populace; from the aimlessness of life amongst all; northward among the barbarians, to beat back the lower elements among them by means of the higher; to find some battle worth fighting, some hero worth following, some new life worth living among these new races, who were pouring in on the decrepit old world. Three hundred years before, Tacitus had written with enthusiasm about the Teutons, their courage, their chastity, their fidelity to wife and children and chieftain. In Rome it had seemed to Marius impossible to find anything but childishness and senility, or both combined; childhood without innocence, old age without experience. Perhaps in the north he might find manhood and youth.

The alliance Aetius was endeavouring to effect for the Empire was with one of the noblest and most civilized of the Goths, with Theodoric, king of the Visigoths of Aquitaine. Marius travelled through the region of the Italian *Latifundia*, the enormous farms which some said were ruining Rome; wide spaces with no habitations except the huge Ergastula, or workhouses, full of celibate slaves, ruled by freedmen who had learned from slavery not sympathy, like Patrick, but only slavishness, and a terrible ingenuity how to wring out the last drop of slave-labour.

He wrote first to his mother from Ravenna—

"Ravenna seems full of two great names, the Augusta Galla Placidia, and Aetius. You remember the death of the Augusta last year at Rome, and the solemn funeral procession which bore her remains hither. For the moment Ravenna seems transformed from a court into a mausoleum of the Augusta. Her mausoleum is a palace of the dead, gorgeous with gold, and gems, and marble mosaics, with brilliant frescoes covering the domed roofs.

"Never surely in the tragic stories of Imperial houses can there have been one more tragic than that of the great Augusta, as they tell it here. Daughter of the great Theodosius; taken captive in her beautiful youth at Alaric's siege of Rome; in her captivity winning the heart of the noblest of the Gothic princes, the young Ataulfus, and in return giving her whole heart to him,—her marriage seemed a bridal not only of two royal hearts, but of two civilizations, of two races, of the north and the south, of the old world and the new. It seemed as if all that is highest and noblest in the old and in the new were united in it and through it. What hope might not dawn out of it for the world? And in one year the fair vision had vanished like a morning dream! The babe born of it, and welcomed with such rapture as a promise for all the world, died in infancy. The brave and generous young Gothic king lay dead in his palace, stabbed in the back by a slave in revenge for the death of his former master. The Augusta was driven out of Barcelona, the city where they were reigning, compelled to go on foot as a conquered captive before the chariot of her husband's successor, and afterwards constrained to marry the General Constantius, a man with no qualifications for her hand but those of an able soldier and a jovial comic actor at camp banquets. He died in a few years, apparently of dullness, from the constraint of the court life.

"She bore herself nobly in her second widowhood, 'the one man,' they say, 'of her family'; ruled the Empire diligently, chose her ministers wisely, steadfastly upheld the Christian faith, and strove to live by its laws; and her son is the Emperor we all know too well! The whole tragedy of her life is compressed in those three relationships: daughter of such a man as Theodosius, wife of such a man as Ataulfus, mother of such a thing as Valentinian!

"I send this by a trusty hand; if for safety's sake thou makest it into a palimpsest, write over it these words—*Placidus semivir amens*.

"The whole of this Imperial city, the whole Empire, at this moment seem but a mausoleum for the Augusta, last of the Romans. For Aetius, alas! the other name of which Ravenna is full, seems no leader likely to preserve the noblest in the old world or the new. He is indeed capable of ruling every one, and capable of understanding everything. To him come 'the groans of the forsaken Britons'; to him the embassies of the conquering Hun. Living as a hostage three years among the Huns, he knows Attila and his people intimately. Chief minister of the Augusta for seventeen years, he knows the Empire to the core of its corrupt heart. He has conquered the Franks, defended the Empire, and will, it seems, conciliate the Goths. But here they cannot forgive or forget his base treachery to Boniface his friend, Count of Africa, tempting him to rebel by false representations of the enmity of the Augusta, and throwing him into alliance with the Vandals in Africa; thus losing Rome her noblest general in Boniface, her richest granary in Africa, and the Church the whole province of Africa, the home of Perpetua, Cyprian, Monica, Augustine.

"Yet there is no one to follow but Aetius; and I am going northward to Gaul. There is hope of an alliance with the Goths, and with their aid we may beat back the Huns.

"Tell our Luciola I have no drops as yet from the Fountain of Youth for her. How indeed could we expect any from Ravenna, this city of mud and marshes—of every kind of mud and every kind of marshy malaria, where water they say is often scarcer and dearer than wine? Fleets of merchant ships, crowds of sailors of all nations, splendid palaces and more splendid churches; but Living Water, the Fountain of Youth; scarcely here!"

His next letter was from Aquileia, the great port of the north of the Adriatic, where his family had had friendships from the days of Jerome, who was born there.

"This is a very great city, great with the natural greatness of its commanding position, guarded by the mountains, guarding the frontier, and commanding the Adriatic; great with the natural growth of its world-wide commerce, no mere artificial product of a heated court.

"I feel better here than at Ravenna. Aquilo, the north wind from the mountains, cools and revives me. I can breathe, and bathe. Perhaps also there is a bracing north wind from the past, from the days of our forefathers, who came here six hundred years ago, when Rome was young, to form an outpost on the frontier against the barbarians of those days. These churches also have reverberated to great voices, even in thy days. Jerome perhaps gathered strength here for his fight for his translation of the Scriptures into the vulgar tongue, and his many other battles. And, moreover, the Lady Digna, to whom thy letter has introduced me, is herself as a fresh breeze from the mountains, and a revival of the old Rome my father

loves, in her noble simplicity of life. Her palace is near the walls, with a lofty tower looking on the crystal waters of the river Natiso and towards the blue mountains of the north. She reminds me of the Aventine, and of thee and of my father and his old Rome. One feels she might have been one of the grand, pure matrons of the Republic."

From Aquileia Marius went through the plains of Lombardy by the south of Gaul to Lyons. Thence he wrote—

"I think of thee continually here, and how in our childhood was engraven on our hearts, from thy lips, the story of the Passion and the Victory of the martyrs of Lyons and Vienne; of the ninety-years-old Bishop Pothinus dying, beaten with the iron rods, in prison; of the mistress and the slave Blandina (like the African Perpetua and Felicitas) suffering the same tortures, sustaining each other in the same conflict, crowned with a similar crown. Blandina the slave maiden kept alive to the last, and, 'as a noble mother animating her children, and sending them home to the Great King,' after the torture from the tossing by the wild beasts, 'going forth as to a marriage-feast to her death,' with the simple confession of faith, '*I am a Christian; no wickedness is done among us.*'

"Ah, beloved, what a golden time that seems to look back on! None of these dividing names, these heresies and schisms, but one glorious name, 'Christian.' None of these degraded lives among His followers. To be a Christian meant then to be *good*, 'to do no wickedness.' Who would not win back such a time of faith and courage, of love and purity, at any cost? If it were only the Huns that ravaged the Empire! If it were only the heathen that did wickedness! If it were only the heretics who persecuted! But I must not write a Book of Lamentations. We have, as our Luciola always says, to live *here* and *now*.

"I am more content than I expected to be with my gracious and learned host, Sidonius Apollinaris. In the first place, he is my host, a relationship in itself demanding loyalty in return, and he is the kindest of hosts. My two mother-tongues are a recommendation for me to him; the kind of natural inability to talk bad Greek and Latin derived from our father and from thee. I cannot, however, even from loyalty to a host, admire his style of poetry, much lauded as it is. The gods and goddesses, the heroes and nymphs, stalk about in it so like second-rate actors in a theatre. They seem at once so childish, poor dears, and so old-fashioned, so shadowy and so wooden; the real world having been long possessed by heroes so much more living, by saints so much more original and interesting than these faded modern pictures of a world ill understood and so long passed away.

"Why Venus and all the faded troop should be called back to bless a Christian marriage, or all Olympus to crown and glorify a modern senator, who at all events, whatever he believes or disbelieves, does not believe in them, one cannot see. Moreover, there are the false quantities which jar on one's ear so curiously! But I must not grow cynical. It must be a lack in me that I have no taste for the wit of acrostics or the pomp of panegyrics. And there is always the relief of turning from these to the simple old music of thy Homer, the earnest thought of thy Aeschylus, the pure limpid verse of our own Virgil. But I hear my host's pleasant voice, and am stopped in good time by his gracious kindness."

"I resume:—We assembled yesterday morning at the sepulchre of Saint Justin, and had Matins and Tierce with all the city. And then when the ordinary people had dispersed, we of the first families of Lyons made a rendezvous at the tomb of Syagrius the Saint. There, on the green sward under the trellised vines, was much merriment, and many good stories were told,—good happily in the sense not only of being witty, but of not being low or bad. And then, when, weary of this idleness, the young men played at tennis, and the old ones at backgammon, witty verses were composed and recited (one set in honour of a towel which had the privilege of wiping the perspiration from the face of an 'illustrious old gentleman,' who had somewhat rashly ventured on tennis rather than on the more tranquil sport of backgammon).

"But 'what of the Huns?' perhaps you will ask. The Huns are some scores of miles away at present, and we are safe in Lyons. I suppose near the frontier they are so used to the roar of this advancing tide of the barbarians that they cease to hear it, like people who live close to a torrent, and only make their merriment a little louder to drown the tumultuous noise. Besides, all the time some of us, and among these my host, are doing what we can to keep off the Huns. Aetius is doing his best to cement the alliance with the Gothic king Theodoric, and we hope he is prospering."

The next letter was from a country house near Arles.

"This villa reminds me of our palace on the Aventine. The vestibule is full of statues. There are books in all kinds of ornamental cases. The ladies read, and seem to love best the sacred Scriptures. At least I found these on the chair where the young daughter of the house had been sitting, a new copy of the Gospels in Jerome's version. Also the relations between the master and his hundreds of slaves are pleasant and friendly.

"Moreover, I am more in touch with Sidonius Apollinaris, who brought me here. I have seen him glow with a genuine passion of indignation against an oppressive Roman governor, who seems to have been ruining his district by exorbitant taxation, starving the labourers, grinding down the farmers, filling the prisons with the wretched victims of the paid informers—a worse invasion than that of the barbarians. I shall be able to endure the tinsel of his panegyrics now that I have seen him burn with a genuine fire against wrong.

"But I am perplexed about this Hilary, Metropolitan of Arles, who died here not long since. The people seemed to think him such a saint, and to be indignant with our Leo for supporting a bishop of his province against his authority. Some say Leo is seeking to found a spiritual autocracy, an empire to tower above patriarch or emperor, above all authorities, ecclesiastical and secular.

"I cannot understand the rights of the controversy. Leo, of course, feels intensely the necessity of unity. He has seen the ruin of the African Church through its own divisions, and seen it become the prey of the heretic Arians. He has seen the chilling of the temperature in the Eastern Church through endless metaphysical discussions and secular battles. He sees the whole Roman world crumbling into dust. And he believes the Church itself, as far as the Church is in the world, must crumble and fall if it is not kept at unity with itself. And also he believes that he himself is the Heir and Vicar of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, and that he has to keep the Church one and indivisible amidst the crash and crumbling of everything else. Is not this what he means? Nevertheless it perplexes me about his dispute with the holy Hilary of Arles.

"I copy for thee a passage from Hilary's *Life of the Holy Honoratus, Bishop of Arles* 'Great,' he writes, 'O illustrious Honoratus, is thy glory. Thy merit did not need to be proved by signs and wonders. Thy life, full of virtues, presented a perpetual miracle. Many miracles and signs indeed we saw, but of these thou thoughtest little. Greater to thee was the joy that Christ Himself should acknowledge thy merits and virtues than that men should observe thy miracles. *Peace also has her martyrs*, and thou, whilst thou didst remain in the body, wast a perpetual witness and martyr for Christ.'"

The next letter of Marius was from Marseilles.

"I am more at home here than since I left thee, with the Presbyter Salvian, his wife Palladia, and their daughter Auspiciola; at home and cheerful. Not that Salvian is an optimist, or takes a cheerful view of the world or of the Church. But he dares to look at things as they are. One feels, with him,

no longer dancing on a crust of ice above an abyss of dark waters. Although the change is scarcely more than that of clinging to the side of a precipice at the edge of an abyss, there *is* the rock to cling to. In short, I have come out of that stifling artificial atmosphere and breathe again. Salvian says of our Rome, 'Our own vices alone have conquered us;' and to see that, if our Rome could indeed see it, would be to repent and live.

"He compares us with the barbarians in a way which recalls Tacitus and his Teutons, perhaps idealizing the barbarians, but scarcely, I fear, caricaturing the Romans. 'You Romans and Christians and Catholics,' he writes, 'are defrauding your brothers, are grinding the faces of the poor, are frittering away your lives over the impure and heathenish spectacles of the amphitheatre; you are wallowing in licentiousness and drunkenness. The barbarians meanwhile, heathens or heretics though they may be, and however fierce towards us, are just and fair in their dealings with one another. The men of the same clan, and following the same king, love one another with true affection. The impurities of the theatre are unknown amongst them. Many of their tribes are free from the taint of drunkenness, and among all, except the Alans and the Huns, chastity is the rule.'

"His own home is like a monastery for austerity and regularity of life. His wife and daughter consecrate themselves to a religious life, and all the household are devoted to the service of the poor. He is a presbyter, but he is revered far and wide for his learning, secular and sacred; his counsel is sought by the highest and the lowest, and he has been called a teacher of bishops (*Magister Episcoporum*).

"His sympathies are with the down-trodden and the poor. He pleads fervently for those wretched peasants who revolted lately in Northern Gaul (called by their oppressors Bagaudæ, *i. e.* a mob). 'They were despoiled, afflicted, murdered, by wicked and bloody judges, and shall we impute their misfortunes to them? We have made them what they are. Shall we call those rebellious and lost whom we compelled to be criminals? By what were they made Bagaudæ (a mob) but by our iniquities, by the injustice of judges, by the proscriptions, rapine, and exactions of those who turned the public revenues into emoluments for themselves?'

"Thank God for these days with Salvian; they make me hope once more."

The last letter was from Toulouse, from the court of Theodoric, King of the Visigoths.

"Here at last! On our way to encounter the enemy at last, among these brave Goths, men at least, if barbarians; Christians in some sort, if Arians. Every morning before dawn the king and some of his household attend divine service in the church. At his banquets no women singers are admitted, no exciting, dissolute songs are allowed. The music, such as it is, is martial and manly.

"And in conclusion, the alliance between the Empire and the Visigoths is accomplished. To-morrow we shall be on our way to join Aetius, and to relieve the city of Orleans. Not a day too soon, they say; God grant it may not be too late. For the countless hosts of the Huns have gathered around the city for weeks; their battering-rams have been planted against the walls, and their unerring arrows have been slaughtering the garrison.

"I dispatch this hence. To-morrow we are to be on our way to the battle-field, wherever and whatever that may prove to be."

CHAPTER IX.
ORLEANS—HER SAINT AND HER SIEGE.

he day after the interview of Baithene and Ethne with the monk, they left Tours, and rowed up the river in a small boat to Orleans. It was fresh life to Baithene to take his place at an oar, to feel delivered from the passive condition of following Eleazar about, interpreting bargains he detested, and picking up fragments of the talk around him in the streets. As he pulled up against the stream, straining every muscle in the contest with wind and water, he felt a man again, and something of a king.

The little boat made good way under his vigorous strokes. But at one point they ran some risk of being seized to act as a ferry-boat for a troop of fugitives, women and children, who were crowded together on the bank on the north side of the river.

“Have mercy on us, have mercy,” they cried, “and carry us across.”

Baithene laid up his oars for a moment and paused. Eleazar with violent gestures urged him forward, but having the power for the moment in his own hands, Baithene gave no heed, but still waited to listen.

They soon gathered that these were fugitives from the Huns, who were rapidly sweeping down on Aquitaine from the north. Their village had been burnt; they had friends in Aquitaine, and were seeking safety by putting the Loire between them and the foe. Miriam’s heart softened at once. Baithene thought the women and children might be ferried over in three or four crossings, while the few men among them must swim. This was accomplished, and the little rescued company, kneeling on the southern bank, showered benedictions on them as they again pulled up the river.

They had to halt twice for the night, and they took care to make their halting-places on the southern shore. On the third evening they reached Orleans.

The voyage had been a great rest and happiness to Ethne. The beauty of the wooded hills clothed with trees, many of them new to her—chestnuts, maples, and poplars; the vineyards with their promise of grapes, and the cultivated fields, delighted her. Here and there also in the cliffs under which they passed were arched doors of caves, which she imagined might be cells of holy hermits or monks like Martin.

When they came to Orleans they found the city in a tumult of apprehension. The walls were carefully guarded, and also the approaches by the river. Soldiers in Roman armour stopped them at the landing-place and forbade them to disembark.

“We do not want any more helpless people to guard or any more hungry mouths to feed,” they said.

It was an anxious moment; if they were turned back there was no other place of refuge. But suddenly Ethne remembered the letter the monk of Tours had given them for Anianus the Bishop. She reminded Baithene, and they told Miriam and Eleazar, who had heard the name of Anianus, and eagerly caught at this means of escape. They handed the tablet to the officer of the guard, and after a little further parley he agreed to let them land, and to have them conducted to the Bishop. Eleazar remained on the quay in charge of his precious merchandise. It was a reversal of relations for Ethne and Baithene to become the patrons and protectors of Eleazar and Miriam.

The Bishop was, as was so often the case in those tumultuous times, also the secular ruler (at all events in the moment of danger), and in a sense the military commander, as well as the spiritual head of the city; the representative of the only organization out of the ancient Roman world of law and order which remained substantially standing.

The name of Anianus was their passport everywhere. When after some delay they were admitted to his presence, it was a matter of no small difficulty, in many ways, to explain their complicated relation to each other and to the world in general. Captive princes or nobles of any kind from Ireland had something of a mythical sound, as if they had dropped out of fairyland, or some old legend, or some far-off fabled Atlantis. That these high-born captives should be also Christians was still more perplexing, the fact of Patrick’s mission having scarcely yet penetrated to Orleans. To expect Ethne or Baithene to define what kind of Christians they were was quite hopeless, they being in blissful ignorance of all heresies and schisms, Eastern or Western, Pelagian, Arian, Nestorian, Eutychian, or Manichean. Then came the other side of the perplexity, their being purchased by a Jew. An Edict of Theodosius had indeed many years before recognized an essential distinction between Jews and Pagans, and had decreed that the Jewish worship was to be respected, and that the Jewish synagogues were not to be destroyed. But that a Jew should own a Catholic Christian as a slave was a questionable thing. Slavery indeed, altogether, was to the Christian Church a questionable right, indeed essentially an unquestionable wrong. But according to Roman law, as an actual fact, it had to be admitted. Not long before, in Gaul, a free woman taken captive and made a slave, though the injustice was admitted, had to be left in bondage. Manumission had always been frequent among the Romans; the redemption of slaves and captives was a constant form of charitable work in the Church; but in the present distress there were no funds at hand for ransom, and, moreover, it must have seemed doubtful whether it would be any gain to these young friendless foreigners, especially to the fair young Irish maiden, to turn them adrift free and unprotected into the world of bloodshed and disorder, of violence and wickedness of every kind around them.

After much kindly consideration, it was decided that quarters should be assigned to the four, and that the question of freedom or slavery should be left in abeyance. But to Baithene’s great joy the condition was added, that no idle hands could be tolerated in the city, threatened as it was with siege and assault from the fierce hordes of Attila, who were fast advancing to cross the Loire, and make a raid on the kingdom of the Visigoths in Aquitaine.

That evening, therefore, the four were established in rooms near the walls of the city, with a sense of freedom for Ethne and Baithene greater than they had felt since they had been swept away from their home. The reversal of relations between the captives and their purchaser, though at first exceedingly displeasing to Eleazar, proved, thanks to the tender pity of Miriam, and the sweet serviceableness of Ethne, a bond of union; Baithene also being naturally ready to render in a princely way twice as much service as he would have done by constraint. Eleazar himself, moreover, was much softened when he saw that their honour was more to be trusted than the security of bonds.

The stipulation imposed on Baithene was no child's play. Very soon the flames of burning villages were to be seen from the walls; then came troops of fugitives flying to take refuge in the country beyond the river, the citizens not daring to extend their hospitality to helpless, hungry strangers, who might not only find the walls of Orleans no shelter for themselves, but make the defence hopeless for all.

Night and day the walls had to be manned and guarded, and the fortifications strengthened as far as possible. Excursions had to be made into the neighbouring country to gather in fruits and corn and cattle while yet there was time to save anything from the plundering of the savage hosts. Thus between carrying stones for building, convoying expeditions for foraging, and guarding the walls, Baithene had little time at home, and was well content with such morsels of food or moments of broken sleep as could be snatched at intervals during his labours. The habits of command and direction, the training of hand and eye in chase, or foray, or skirmish among the clans at home, had given him faculties for military service which were soon recognized. He had a quickness in seeing and seizing opportunities, and a dash of daring courage which delighted the Roman officers, whilst to him the training in the Roman discipline was of the highest price.

Nearer and nearer drew the fierce nation of warriors and plunderers, numbered by hundreds of thousands. By their mere presence they would have eaten up the land like a cloud of locusts; and they came not as mere locusts devouring in order to live, but as a predatory army fearfully organized to destroy; bent on carrying away all the plunder they could, and also on leaving behind all the devastation they could; ravaging not merely to impoverish Gaul, but through impoverishing Gaul to ruin Rome.

Soon the fires of the burnt villages and towns smouldered and died out; and instead came the outposts of the terrible horde itself. Troops of Tartar horsemen dashed up to the walls of the city; little beardless brown men with long black hair, man and horse apparently grown into one, the riders waving their spears as they stood on the backs of their horses, or stooping underneath to pick up some dropped weapon; the man apparently an integral development of the horse, the horse not so much ridden as inspired and possessed by the man. Baithene, gazing at them for the first time from the walls, in the dusk of the evening, could not wonder at the rumours that they were not human at all, but the offspring of witches and demons. From time to time through the darkness came an unearthly combined yell, like the howl of a wild beast or malignant demon; and he crossed himself, thought of the exorcism in the baptismal service, and repeated his renunciation of the devil from the bottom of his heart. He had to watch through that night, and early in the first flush of the morning he saw that the horizon was dim with a great cloud of dust, whilst in the distance, through the silence of the dawn, was heard the grinding of huge wagon-wheels, with all the tumult of the movement of a vast multitude.

Slowly the huge host gathered in from all sides, until the confused hum and murmur began to define itself into various sounds—the creaking of wheels, the cracking of whips, the lowing of oxen, the neighing of horses, the harsh voices of men, the shrill voices of women, even the wailing of babes; and through all the deep under-hum of an enormous mass of human beings in motion. The hearts of the men on the walls quailed with a weird terror; for through all came the unfamiliar cadences of wild foreign speech, with a sense that this living mass which was closing in around them with deadly purpose, to plunder and kill, to burn and to destroy, was pouring forth from the unknown boundless spaces of savage wildernesses, an interminable tide of destruction swelling up as from some unfathomable abyss of hell.

A preternatural terror hung over these hordes, but more especially around Attila himself, the Scourge of God, the ally of demons, who was known now to be in their midst, directing the devastations with the deadliest skill of destruction, practised in ravaging the fairest lands into deserts, and in razing the stateliest cities into ruin so utter as never to be repaired. With a frightful faculty of appropriating from the civilization he sought to destroy just the very elements which enabled him to destroy it, from the courts of Ravenna and Constantinople he had learnt the art of conquering by dividing. And at this moment the chief anxiety in Orleans was the doubt whether he might not have succeeded by his cunning in breaking the alliance between Theodoric, King of the Visigoths, and the great General Aetius, who had promised Bishop Anianus some weeks before in his palace at Arles to relieve the city with the combined forces of Goth and Roman, at the latest, by the fourteenth of June. Attila was too shrewd to attempt to substitute Roman discipline and methods of warfare for the dash and fury of the charges and wheelings of his wild horsemen. But he had learnt something of the art of besieging from his foes, from the captives of the cities he had ruined; and in the dusk of the morning they saw the huge battering-rams being drawn up to the walls.

It was the combination of the mechanical weight of a vast multitude, a host not of men but of nations, of the wild swiftness and unexpectedness of their assaults, reckless of peril as a troop of wild beasts, with the preternatural terror of the unknown spaces from which they issued, and the unknown powers of darkness from which they were said to have sprung, that made the approach of these Huns so paralyzing. And in Attila himself the terror was concentrated. The terror of his name and the weight of his rule, if that could be called rule which was a disorganization of all existing order, were known from the borders of China and the great Tartar desert through Hungary to Constantinople, and to the coasts of northernmost Scandinavia. Thus these demon armies had for the moment a Satanic Majesty, a Prince of the power of the air, before whose crafts and assaults the feeble diplomacy of Constantinople and Ravenna was as the innocent cunning of a child.

As the end of Baithene's watch was drawing near he heard a yell from the advancing host, which seemed a cry of welcome and triumph; and, straining his eyes, he caught sight of a multitude of horsemen whirling round a central point like a whirlpool. There were frantic cries from many of these Tartar horsemen; there was a wheeling and rushing to and fro of the nimble little horses, a waving of spears, a flaunting of rude banners, a metallic clashing of cymbals and shields. And through the still morning air the sound of one terrible name was borne to the besieged in countless shrill tones of exultation—"Attila! Attila!" The besieged repeated it to each other in hoarse murmurs and whispers, as those who think they see some gruesome preternatural phantoms in the dark. "Attila! Attila! the darling of the devil, the Scourge of God."

The hour for relieving guard had arrived; silently the wearied men left the walls.

Baithene was angry with himself for the presentiments of evil which seemed to reduce him to the resignation of dull despair. But as they came near the cathedral, the little band of soldiers met a procession of white-robed priests, heading a multitude eagerly thronging to the church. He entered with them, and knelt in the stillness amidst the throng of silent worshippers.

Then came the solemnity of the daily Eucharist. Not lamentations and litanies, but hymns of joy and thanksgiving, in the sonorous Latin which was the common tongue, in some measure understood by all. *Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis.* "We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory, O God, Heavenly King, God the Father Almighty.

"O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesu Christ, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, Who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Thou Who takest away the sins of the world, receive our prayer; Thou Who sittest at the right hand of the Father, have mercy upon us; for Thou only art holy, Thou only art the Lord, Thou only art most high, O Jesu Christ, with the glory of God the Father."

And afterwards the great hymn of perpetual festival. "It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God, through Christ our Lord, through Whom the Angels praise Thy Majesty, Whom the

Dominations adore, before Whom the Powers tremble, the Heavens and all the Powers therein, Whom the Blessed Seraphim with mutua exultation celebrate; with Whom we also would pray that Thou shouldst command our voices to take part, with humble confession, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth, Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory; Hosanna in the highest; Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord."

And as he listened, the mighty host of the barbarians, and the little company of the besieged, seemed to dwindle into a mere ship's company on a stormy sea, whilst all around him were the open heavens with their victorious multitudes before the Throne. Whatever the result of this present conflict might be, the victory along the whole line was sure, the victory of good, of God, of the Lamb that was slain, of the Redeeming Lord conquering and to conquer. With a heart full of peace and courage he knelt at the close of the service, when the aged, white-haired Bishop, shepherd and father of the people, came forward and raised his hand in benediction. He lingered some time in the silence after the voices ceased, when a gentle hand was laid on his shoulder, and looking up he saw the radiant face of his sister, and the soft grey eyes, luminous with the joy and trust within. Then together they left the church and returned to Eleazar's rooms.

"The church is never shut day nor night," she said; "every hour without ceasing prayers go up to God to relieve the city."

"The succour ought to be here soon indeed," said Baithene, "if the city is to be saved."

After that the brother and sister had little opportunity of speaking to each other for many weeks. Baithene was on the ramparts; whilst Ethne was with another army of succour organized by the Bishop within the city—a band of devoted women who took the wounded into places of shelter, dressed their wounds, and did all they could to relieve the starvation and misery all around.

All these weeks the terrible struggle went on, by assault, blockade, starvation. The battering-rams were drawn up to the walls; but these in the untrained hands of the Huns were more than matched by the catapults and fiery missiles thrown by the trained soldiers of the Roman garrison.

It was the arrows of the Huns, shot with unerring aim from their huge bows, which did the deadliest damage, clearing the walls of the defenders, as they fell one by one smitten to death. It was at the risk of life that the Bishop and his clergy came up on the ramparts, with chant of litanies, and bearing sacred relics, to reanimate the garrison.

More than five weeks had passed since Bishop Anianus had seen the General Aetius in the palace at Arles, and obtained a promise of speedy succour. The fourteenth of June, the day he promised at the latest to bring the relieving forces, was fast approaching, and the courage and hope of the besieged were failing. Not a few began to murmur against the Bishop, and to hint that he had deceived them with promises of imaginary succour. About the tenth or eleventh of June the bright sunshine was clouded over by a fearful storm. For three days the thunder rolled, the lightning flashed, heavy clouds darkened all the land, a tempest of rain and hail poured down, the battle of the elements giving a respite for the time to the battle with the barbarian host.

At last the sun broke forth again, only proving a signal for the renewal of the deadly strife. Once more Bishop Anianus sent forth a messenger to the Roman general, with the appeal, "If ye come not to-day it will be too late."

The soldier never reappeared. Then it was rumoured that the Bishop himself had gone forth to negotiate with Attila, and had returned with the message that Attila would accept nothing but absolute surrender. Then came a tumult of despair, a crashing of walls, a dashing open of gates. There were countless contradictory rumours as to how it all happened; but one thing was certain, the gates were open, and the city was laid bare to her foes. The Huns were pouring in on that day, which was to have been the day of deliverance, in overwhelming numbers, with the fury of a savage host little accustomed to delay, and destitute of mercy; massacring unresisting women and children, sparing none and nothing except for the purposes of pillage or slavery.

Yet still the Bishop and the clergy, with many of the people, filled the cathedral, and poured forth prayers in their anguish to God, the aged Bishop prostrate before the altar, and bathing the steps with his tears.

It was said that at that last hour the aged Bishop sent forth a messenger from the cathedral to the walls, saying, "Look forth from the ramparts and see if God's mercy will yet succour us." The messenger came back and said he beheld no man. But still the Bishop commanded the people, "Pray in faith; the Lord will deliver you to-day."

They went on praying. Again the aged voice they had trusted so long rose and bade one of them mount the walls and look out again. No help was seen approaching.

For the third time the Bishop said, "If ye pray in faith the Lord will yet be at hand to help you speedily!"

Then with weeping and loud lamentations they implored the mercy of the Lord. And when that prayer of agony had arisen, once more, for the third time, the old man bade them go to the wall and look. And back to that weeping multitude, waiting in breathless silence, came at last the glad tidings, "We saw from afar as it were a cloud rising out of the ground."

And the Bishop said, "*It is the help of God*."

Then through the city, from the top of the tower, resounded the cry, "*The Romans! the Romans!*" Aetius and King Theodoric with their troops dashed up to the gates; there was an encounter outside the walls; the Huns were defeated; the Roman and Gothic army poured into the city, and there were deadly encounters in every street.

Victory remained with the relieving force. Gradually the fierce brown men from the East were driven out of the gates; the whole army of Attila was thrown into disorder, and made a hasty retreat through the land they had ravaged into a wilderness, knowing well the deadly vengeance that awaited them from every fragment of the towns and villages they had ruined and despoiled.

Bishop Anianus did not forget mercy even in this moment of rescue and triumph. Many a fallen foe among the Huns was saved by his intercession, even in the city they had so nearly brought to destruction.

Baithene came eagerly into the Jew's lodging to share the joy of deliverance with Ethne; but to his dismay she was not there. It was some little time before he found her in one of the streets, kneeling beside a dying boy left behind by the Huns, leaning the poor ugly brown head on her knee, moistening the parched lips with water, chafing the cold, quivering hands. "Brother," she said softly, "it might have been thee!"

The death-pallor was on the lips, and soon the quivering limbs lay rigid on the ground beside them.

Then, looking up, the two saw a young Roman on horseback, with his eyes fixed on them. He had been watching Ethne for some minutes in silence. Ethne, raising her eyes to his, said, "Bishop Anianus told us to do what we could even for a wounded enemy."

There was a glow of sympathy in his face as he replied—

“Pardon me, lady! I was thinking it was just what my own mother and sister in Rome would have done.” And with a gesture of reverence he rode on.

But that night in his dreams there came to Marius a vision of the fair kind face of the maiden with the soft dark-grey eyes, and the poor brown head of the dying Hun on her knee.

Could it have been a dim, prophetic vision of another siege of Orleans, and another Maid of Orleans, seeing a wounded Englishman dying by the roadside, alighting from her horse, and, like a tender sister, holding his head on her knee to the last? Or was it only the remembrance stamped into his heart of the young Irish maiden?

CHAPTER X.
TROYES—HER SAINT AND HER SALVATION.

he siege of Orleans was raised. But it was some time before any feeling of security could be restored to the city; before the rescued citizens could feel sure that the flying squadrons of the nimble Tartar horsemen were not merely wheeling away in some of their bewildering manœuvres, to dash back with redoubled force against the walls.

All that night, therefore, there was anxious watching kept from rampart and tower. Between the almost incredible joy of rescue, and the moans of the wounded and dying, there was little sleep in Orleans that night.

Baithene kept guard near one of the breaches of the shattered walls, and gradually the silence of the deserted fields, so lately the camping-ground of a nation, flowed over him with a sense of deliverance and peace. For some time there was a distant sound of the multitudinous movements of a retreating host; but the sounds were like those of an ebbing tide, growing fainter and fainter and more broken, till they died away altogether, and he felt that the foe was really gone.

Joyful and solemn was the early Eucharist in the cathedral the next morning. Baithene met Ethne at the portal. Bishop Anianus and all the clergy were there. The church was full, and every prayer and anthem went up with the throb of a great multitude. But again in the moment of triumph, as in the moment of anguish, the Eucharistic hymns rose up beyond the moment. Deep in every heart was thanksgiving for rescue from ravage and ruin; but deeper and higher still flowed the eternal tide of joy in the rescue and redemption of the world, not for a moment but for ever, not by a victorious army but by a willing Victim, not through the triumph of force but through the weakness of the Cross. As through the anguish of suspense had risen the Eucharistic song, "*We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee*," so through the triumph flowed the tenderness of the Eternal Sacrifice, the love that was perpetually giving itself.

Roman and Gothic soldiers knelt together. Ethne's head was bowed, and her eyes, when she lifted them, were full of tears. Perhaps alone among that exulting multitude, in her prayers the vanquished and retreating enemy had a share. The ugly brown head of the dying boy so near her brother's age, his feeble, grateful smile, his groans of pain, were in her heart. Perhaps in that worshipping multitude there were few besides who felt as she did how far the tide of redeeming love might reach from the heart of "the Lamb of God, Who taketh away the sins of the world."

As they left the church, at the door they met once more the young Roman officer who had watched them from his horse while the Tartar boy was dying. He evidently recognized them, and respectfully made way for them.

The city was full of joy. Every house in it for the moment seemed like a side-chapel of a cathedral, so deeply had the intercessions of Bishop Anianus with God and man, with the Roman general and the Gothic king, day and night in the church, in the streets, and on the ramparts, moved every heart.

Ethne and Baithene had already many friends in Orleans, and began to feel at home there in a community of brethren. They would gladly have stayed there, but Eleazar was restless to depart, and, to the dismay of Miriam, nothing would dissuade him from going northward in the track of the retreating army. He had fellow-countrymen and commercial relations in Troyes. The city of Troyes was a great commercial emporium, the central point of a network of Roman roads, and once there, he thought he could make his way whither he would. The second morning after the raising of the siege, the little party therefore started from one of the gates of Orleans. They had hired of a citizen two strong mules, which were to accompany them to the nearest point on the river Seine, by which Eleazar had determined to reach Troyes. Danger was everywhere, but he felt safe and less likely to be observed in a boat on a river. As they went through the gate, the young Roman officer was there, commanding the guard. He saw them at once, and this time came forward and asked if he could render them any assistance.

"Surely," he said, "you are not going forth on the track of the enemy across this waste land?"

Eleazar was disposed to resent any interference with his private affairs, but he dared not refuse to state whither and on what errand they were going.

"We must needs go hence without delay," he said; "but we are only poor folk, and our poverty will be our best protection against plunder. In a short time we hope to be safe amongst friends."

Marius, the young Roman, felt he had no right to inquire further. Besides, what protection had he to offer? Already a portion of the Roman and Gothic armies had left in pursuit of the retreating Huns, and that day the rest were to follow, leaving Orleans to repair her own walls and defend herself. Therefore, though with a sore heart, and much perplexed as to the relations between the fair-haired youth and maiden and the dark, Oriental-looking old man, he let the little company pass on. To direct attention to them might, he felt, only increase their peril, but he watched them far across the desolate plain, until the little band disappeared from his sight on the edge of a forest.

Eleazar was well versed in making his way through perils. They rather avoided the imperial roads, and crept along through by-ways. As it happened, their present peril was rather from hunger than from robbery, so thoroughly had the Huns ravaged the land and massacred or hunted away the inhabitants. By day they travelled miles without seeing a human being. The green corn had been cut down for the cattle; the vineyards were a tangle of scarred and broken stems; the husbandmen and vine-dressers had fled no one knew whither. The June sunshine shone down on a broad waste of trampled desert. All along the way, moreover, there were ghastlier traces of the invasion; unburied corpses lying by the wayside in heaps, or one by one, smitten down in their flight; and at night, when they sought shelter behind the walls of some burnt village, only the dogs gathered round them—cowed, lean, hungry dogs, whom the Irish deer-hound for the most part frightened away—poor famished dogs, finding terrible food in the human bones scattered around the ruined homes.

Only one night did they happen to find any traces of the inhabitants. It was the last day before they reached the banks of the Seine. They had encamped for the night on the edge of a forest, and spread their rugs and garments on the ground inside the ruined walls of a hovel. In the middle

was a hole full of ashes, and on these still lay some charred chestnuts. Outside was a stone trough by a little spring, which bubbled up and trickled into it; a broken pitcher had been left beside it. In a corner of the little ruined home Ethne discovered a rude wooden cradle and a child's rattle. When she saw it she burst into an uncontrollable fit of weeping. When Miriam tried to comfort her in this rare burst of emotion, "Where, where is the poor mother?" was all she could say, "and the little child?"

When she recovered, and had begun with Baithene to gather chips for the fire among the trees near at hand, they heard a faint hushed wail near them, as if some one were trying to soothe the cries of a child. Creeping softly on into the forest, they came on a little family group, an old man and a young woman, with two children crying for hunger. Something in Ethne's face and voice always made people trust her, and to her delight she found she understood what they were saying to each other.

"They are of the Bagaudæ!" she said to Baithene. "The poor oppressed peasants of our own race!" and she insisted on bringing them all to the hovel.

Eleazar was not altogether pleased at this addition to the family circle; but Miriam welcomed them as her father Abraham might of old. The fire was lit, and cakes of flour were laid on it, and shared with the hungry peasants. The children were evidently quite at home. They ran up to the cradle, and for the moment all their sorrows were blotted out at the discovery of their own lost toys; and soon all slept, except Ethne and the mother, who held a whispered conversation.

"What will you do to-morrow night?" Ethne asked, a royal instinct of providing for others always deep in her heart.

"Perhaps we may creep back home again," the woman said.

At first she seemed afraid to say more; but no one could hesitate long to confide in Ethne. And soon her story came out.

"The Huns are gone," Ethne said, "and the Romans and Goths are pursuing them."

But that scarcely seemed to comfort the poor mother. She explained that though the Huns were their worst enemies, as they destroyed their crops and burnt their homes, still, whoever ruled, they, the peasants, were always slaves, sure to be compelled to work as hard and live on as little as possible, whether the masters were Goths or Romans; and it seemed that in some respects the Roman tax-gatherers were the worst oppressors of all, because they understood best how to wring out the last farthing.

Then, seeing Ethne's sympathetic distress, she took to comforting her in turn, and confided to her that her husband and the men of the family were in hiding not far off, and that they had little secret storehouses of fruits and grain. She told her also of a wonderful old man, who lived alone in a cave of the forest, and spoke of the good Lord and Saviour, and baptized the little ones and taught them, and sometimes gathered them together for the Holy Eucharist. And so Ethne was comforted.

At last they reached the river Seine, and found a few frightened boatmen willing to row them up to Troyes, which they reached in safety on the fourth evening after they left Orleans. There Eleazar found his friends, but received a scant welcome.

"Why came you hither?" they said. "Of what use is it to be at the meeting-place of roads going in every direction, when the stations on all the roads are abandoned, and many of the roads themselves broken up? The Huns are pushing on through the country. Some of their horsemen galloped past the town yesterday, and to-morrow we may be overwhelmed by the whole flying host."

The wilful old man was convinced for once that he had made a mistake, but he said—

"Who can say which way is the worst? Southward are the Romans and Goths, victorious; here are the Huns, defeated. The victorious Romans are as bad for us to encounter as the defeated Tartars. Little choice for us between heathen vanquished and Christian victors. What will the citizens of Troyes do?"

"We have no defence," was the grim reply. "Troyes has no walls."

"Why then," said Eleazar, "do you not all take flight at once?"

"Troyes has a Bishop," was the reply; "a great saint, who is clothed in rough raiment, and lives on nothing, they say, like our Elijah. He is called Lupus. The people believe in him; they believe the city is walled around by his prayers."

"Another Anianus! another living saint!" murmured Ethne, turning with shining eyes on her brother. "We shall be saved, but I wonder how!"

Eleazar's acquaintance resumed—

"It is strange; it makes one think of our old histories in spite of oneself. It is like Elisha and his wall of fire."

Miriam's face quivered with emotion.

"The God of Elisha is living," she sighed, "and surely He is never far off."

Eleazar made no reply but a despairing groan, and went out to find a safe hiding-place for his chests. But when Miriam and he were alone together again he said reproachfully—

"Thinkest thou the angels of God will build walls of fire around these Gentiles? As they have done unto us so shall it be done unto them."

"I know not," was Miriam's reply. "I was thinking of the old words, 'Should I not spare Nineveh, the great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left, and also much cattle?'"

"But that," said Eleazar, "is in the Book of Jonah, a wonderful and mysterious apologue, which it is dangerous for the people who know not the law, especially for women, to interpret."

That evening Ethne reminded Baithene that a monk of Tours had given them on the second tablet a letter to Lupus, Bishop of Troyes—the very man whose prayers, as Eleazar's acquaintance had said, made a wall of fire round the city.

Eleazar had found the introduction to Bishop Anianus of Orleans too satisfactory for him to refuse that the captives should make use of this second tablet. The next morning, therefore, Ethne and Baithene went to the church to present their introduction. The good, aged Bishop himself lay prostrate before the altar in sackcloth and ashes. After a time he rose, lifted his hands in benediction, and went forth through the streets at the head of a procession of clergy and people, also in penitential robes of sackcloth, with ashes on their heads, chanting litanies. Ethne and Baithene followed. They had been impressed by the power and light in the sunken eyes and on the worn and hollow face of the Bishop; but they had little

hope of getting near the holy man himself, until, as he entered his own door, they saw him pause on the threshold, that the poor mothers might draw near for him to lay his hands on their children and bless them. Then Ethne and Baithene ventured to press near, and present him with the old monk's tablet. It was at once accepted with a gracious welcome, and the brother and sister were led into the house, and committed to the care of an aged priest.

"Alas! my children," he said, "I fear you have come to the very den of the lion. Attila and the Huns are at our doors; walls and gates we have none. This very morning the tramp of the host has been heard, and the Bishop is to lead us forth in solemn procession to plead with Attila for mercy. Perhaps you will help us more by your prayers than we can help you."

It was indeed too true. The savage cries of the horsemen, the heavy grind of the wagons, all the signs of the advance of the savage horde, with which they had grown so terribly familiar during the siege of Orleans, were around them again, growing louder and louder, nearer and nearer, every hour. And there was absolutely no defence; no walls, no garrison, nothing but a multitude of unwarlike citizens, with the women and children; absolutely no defence but faith and prayer.

When the brother and sister returned to Eleazar, they found him far more gentle than usual, and reproaching himself.

"Miriam, my wife," he said, "I have brought you all into this den of lions, and I am no Daniel; and I had no command to come!"

As he spoke, a procession of clergy drew near in white robes, and at the head the aged Bishop in full sacerdotal vestments. Slowly they advanced, chanting the psalms of Eleazar's own people, in Latin, David's familiar Miserere, *'In the multitude of Thy mercies, blot out my iniquities*." And the old Jew reverently bent his head, swept away on the tide of prayer. It seemed also as if some individual arrow had pierced his own conscience, for as the captives followed the procession, and he was left alone with his wife, he said to her—

"I had no call to come hither; no call to make slaves of these children! Miriam, *what* is driving me hither and thither through the earth? Surely there *is* the child; we *shall* find her; we *will* ransom her and make her all a child of our house has a right to be. It is for her I am striving and bargaining, and wandering like Cain to and fro through the earth. But is it of the Lord? Or can it be that the Adversary is hunting me hither and thither by his enchantments?"

Then, after some hesitation, Miriam ventured to say, in a voice quivering with emotion—

"Have you not told me, my beloved, that there is an idol, an enchantment, an enchanter, a thing, a demon, called Mammon?"

"It may be," he replied, with a startled look of horror, as one half-waking from a nightmare. "But however that may be, this Bishop has the look of an Elijah. Let us go in and pray!"

Slowly the procession moved on with the Bishop at its head, and closely following him, a young deacon called Nemorius, clasping to his breast the book of the Gospels bound in gold. Numbers of the townspeople were following. Ethne returned to Miriam, but Baithene was swept on in the tide.

Close on the outskirts of the town they encountered the advance-guard of the host pressing on to the plunder of the city. The nimble brown men with the swift horses, which were as part of themselves, wheeled around them. Javelins were raised to hurl at them, spears were pointed, with the fierce howls and cries which seemed to have caught the tone of the wild beasts of the desert. Nor were these aimless, unmeaning menaces. Even while the procession advanced towards the enemy, Attila had given the order to cut them all down. Nemorius the young deacon fell pierced to death, with his golden Gospels still clasped to his breast; and many sank wounded or dead beside him. It seemed as if there would be a general massacre. But still the old Bishop Lupus pressed on, until he reached Attila; and then, something in the venerable figure and the worn, aged face, with its fire undimmed by the seventy years, something in the man himself, seemed suddenly to impress the fierce and haughty conqueror who had insulted emperors without fear, and had destroyed cities and devastated provinces without mercy.

Attila gave order for the carnage to cease, and at a nod, at a look from him, javelins were lowered, spears were couched, the eager war-horses were held in check, and the procession with the white-haired Bishop in his priestly robes stood still, surrounded by the checked host of foes, confronting the Desolator of nations.

It was as if a raging sea had been arrested at full tide, each foaming wave frozen into stillness in the curve of its breaking.

What was said in that wonderful interview can scarcely be known. Few who could understand were near enough to hear.

It was rumoured afterwards that Attila himself claimed to be "the Scourge of God," and that the Bishop with lofty meekness replied—

"If thou art the Scourge of God, chasten us as much as the Hand that holds thee permits."

Probably this was merely a dramatic echo in words of the deed done. Whatever was said, what was felt and done cannot be denied.

Troyes was no Rome guarded by the glory of centuries and the magic of a great name. It was an unhistorical, unwalled town, such as Attila had burned and sacked by scores. The Bishop bore no great title such as he could have heard of; it was simply the man, the saint, the man of God that moved him,—moved him not merely to turn aside from an intended enterprise, but to curb his fierce hosts in the full career of plunder and slaughter; a host that was not composed only of his own people, but of the fiercer and more lawless elements of the Gothic tribes, and of Alans and Vandals. One stipulation only the leader of that savage host made; and the stipulation was almost a greater tribute to the Bishop's character and influence than the granting of his request. Attila said he would spare the city on one condition, that the aged Bishop should leave it and accompany him and his hordes to the Rhone. Perhaps he meant it as a test of the saint's courage and sincerity. If so, they stood the test. The old man yielded himself up to Attila, and the procession, with the grateful citizens, returned to the rescued city. Perhaps some of them felt that they owed their deliverance to a double sacrifice: the aged Bishop, who offered up his life amidst the perils of the hostile army; and the young deacon, who had laid it down pierced by their spears.

Silently Baithene re-entered the dwelling where his sister awaited him with Eleazar and Miriam.

"Has anything come of this bearding of the lion?" Eleazar asked.

"*Everything*," Baithene replied. "The Bishop has given himself up to the Huns, and the city is saved."

"*In* the lion's den!" said Eleazar, bowing his head and hiding his face.

"With Him Who can stop the mouths of the lions," murmured Miriam.

“With the Creator of the lions!” said Ethne. “He made everything *good*, they told us in Ireland. Even the lions! Even Attila is not *only* a destroyer.”

Afterwards, when they were alone, she said to Baithene—

“Who can tell what even Attila might have been if the Christians he met had all been saints!”

“He seems to have a wonderful eye for a saint,” Baithene admitted. “But we must pray hard for the Bishop.”

“I do not believe Attila will hurt a hair of his head,” rejoined Ethne. “He is, after all, nothing worse than a Hun, and I cannot forget the poor ugly brown head that I had to hold, or the kind dying eyes that looked into mine.”

CHAPTER XI.
A FIELD OF SLAUGHTER, AND A FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH.

So the flood of destruction was turned aside from Troyes, and swept on to the deadly encounter with the armies of Rome and her allies, under the command of Aetius the great Roman general, and Theodoric the Gothic king, in the Catalaunian plains near Châlons.

The great shock of the battle of the nations (the Hunnenschlacht) came at last.

It was said that before the battle, Attila had a solemn consultation in his tent with his augurs, and by various methods of divination they warned him of disaster, but said that a great leader of his foes would fall on the field; and that Attila, believing that this leader must be Aetius, deemed that the loss of thousands would be compensated by the death of that one. Probably personal resentment also may have entered into his dislike of Aetius, once a hostage among the Huns, and afterwards their ally.

But whether the battle was forced on him or chosen by him, and how it began, none seem able to say. The confusion that hangs about the story of great battles does not begin with gunpowder; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke, and the dust of the arena hang in blinding clouds around them all. And this conflict on the plains between Troyes and Châlons was one of the great critical battles of the world. A little shallow runnel of water, it was said, became a great torrent of blood on that fatal field. Three hundred thousand were left there dead. “A battle ruthless, manifold, immense, obstinate,” fought on from the afternoon into the night. In the morning after it the Romans and the Gothic allies, left in possession of the field, strewn with corpses, saw that the Huns did not return to the fight, but kept encamped behind their wagons, where they had fled for shelter. This was all the proof they had of victory. The battle was scarcely won; but the Huns were gone, and they were suffered to go unpursued. Gone as it proved for ever; from Gaul and all Teutonic Europe. But of that no man then could be sure.

Marius wrote on the morrow of the battle—“The messengers are to start for Rome at once. Fortunately only my left hand is wounded, and that but slightly, and so I can write. The battle is won; or at least it is over. The battle-field and the dead are left to us. The Huns are behind their wagons. Theodoric, the brave old Gothic king, is slain. Some say Attila would have been content to lose the battle if Aetius had fallen, as he thought the augurs promised. But Aetius lives and diplomatizes still. And the heroic old Goth is dead—a hero and king to the last. Unmindful of his threescore years, I saw him galloping to and fro, cheering on his people to the fight, when he was thrown from his horse, and fell under the feet of the advancing horsemen. They are searching now for his body among the heaps of slain who died around their king.

“They say Attila in leading on his hosts bade them despise our Roman forces with the ancient defensive array of the shields locked into the testudo, and make their onset on the young nations who could not only defend themselves but assail. ‘Cut the sinew and the limbs will relax,’ he cried. ‘Him who is fated to conquer no dart will touch; him who is doomed to die Fate will find amidst the sloth of peace.’ He might have spared his taunts to us Romans. Romans or barbarians, who could say who fought best when all fought with the hope of beating back the flood of destruction for ever, and with the certainty that if it were not beaten back, it would overwhelm them all? It was no conflict between machines and battering-rams and Roman walls, but between flesh and blood, fierce and desperate men fighting hand to hand for life or death. They say three hundred thousand lives were lost upon this fatal field; three hundred thousand souls there passed away—whence or whither, who can say? Every kind of weapon was there—javelin, spear, huge Tartar bow, Roman shield and sword; amidst the din of every kind of language. Never, I should think, could confusion have been greater; and to confusion of tongues, before the battle ended, was added the bewilderment of darkness. We began at three o’clock, and the conflict raged on through the night. Aetius himself strayed in the dark amongst the Huns, whose language, fortunately for him, he knew. And yet, in spite of the confusion of tribes and tongues, the issue is clear, clearer I think than the issue of battles can often be. For it is, at bottom, the conflict of civilization with barbarism, of hope with despair, of building with destroying, of order with anarchy, of heathenism with Christianity, of life with death; and in the main, civilization, order, hope, Christianity, life, have won the day.

“At this moment I hear the death-wail of the Goths around the body of their king. They think they have rescued the royal corpse from the heap of slain beneath which it lay.

“Still the Huns keep behind their wagons. Attila their king is among them; but around him there is no shout as for a king.

“The field is won; the host of the Huns, the great flood of devastation, is ebbing back to its deserts. God grant it be for ever.

“It seems decided that we make no pursuit, but let the flood ebb away beyond the Rhone. To-morrow I go southward with a detachment to Troyes. Farewell.”

All the day of the great battle tidings kept flowing in to Troyes. None ventured beyond the city, for the battle was said to be raging not more than five miles away. There was indeed no roll of the thunder of guns; but the echo of distant tumult came faintly now and then through the hush of the July afternoon.

Troyes knew that her Bishop was there. Who could say that if the battle were lost, vengeance might not fall on his head? But if Attila won, *all* was lost.

All day prayer went up ceaselessly in the churches, but mostly in silence, or following the low litanies of the choir, so heavy was the weight of suspense.

A confusion of contradictory rumours reached the city: first it was reported that the Romans had won the height on which all might depend; then that Theodoric the great King of the Visigoths was slain. After that fell the darkness. And through the night people took refuge in the churches, and silent prayer went up; until at last, in the quiet dawn of the July morning, came the news that the battle was over, that Attila and his Huns had fled behind their wagons, and that the Roman army held the field. Soon came the further news that Attila and his host were retreating towards the Rhone, carrying Bishop Lupus with them. The city and the land were saved from the destroyer, but who could answer for the saintly life so freely

offered up for the people?

To Ethne and Baithene the city, in a sense they themselves, seemed orphaned afresh; and in their different ways and words, the little group of four, Irish and Hebrew, poured out their hearts together for the prophet still in the den of lions.

There was much to be done for the crippled and wounded who were borne in from time to time from the battle. Baithene went out with the wagons to carry them in; Ethne was again among the deaconesses and consecrated virgins, succouring the wounded.

Late in the evening Baithene came with a cart to the door of the house where Eleazar was sojourning; he asked to be allowed to bring in a young Roman officer who had recognized him. True to the hospitality of their race and their religion, Eleazar and Miriam would not refuse. Was not Abraham, "the father of the faithful," also the "father of guests"? Had he not received the heathen stranger into his house? yet had not the Almighty been more merciful than Abraham, rebuking the patriarch for not tolerating the imperfect worship of his heathen guest? The Romans had indeed destroyed Jerusalem, but this wounded Roman must be welcomed as a guest from God, and the guest-chamber was made ready for him.

The stranger was Marius, whose wounds were more severe than he had chosen to report in his letters to his family.

For the first day he lay quite still, weak from loss of blood; but Miriam's homely skill in nursing and preparing food for the sick proved of good service, and on the third morning he was able to creep out with Baithene and Ethne to the church. On the way they told him of the rescue of Troyes from the plunder of Attila's host through the intercession of Lupus, and how the aged Bishop had given himself up to the Huns for his people.

By degrees the whole story of the Irish captives became clear to him: the baptism by Patrick, the father's rank as a chieftain among his people, their capture by British pirates, their hearing of the letter of Patrick to Coroticus, their purchase by Eleazar the Jew, their interview with the friendly monk at Tours, and his letters to Bishop Anianus of Orleans and Bishop Lupus of Troyes.

His heart went out to them as captive nobles, in their own land of a house as ancient as his own; as in unjust bondage to a Hebrew, yet so far legally his, that except legally they could not be set free; and above all as Christians, Catholic Christians of the old faith, yet in some way of the old faith in a new way, so fervent, and simple, and unaware of all the controversies that had for many worn its poetry into prose; glowing with a Christian faith that seemed in some unspeakable way steeped anew in the freshness of dawn, baptized into the death and life of Christ the Lord. So, during those days in the house together, the sweet household way and gracious services of Ethne stole into his inmost heart and took possession of it before he was aware. She was like his mother, yet unlike, as the rose of dawn to the tender glow of evening.

At last the day came when Marius had to leave with his detachment. The day before he left he was trying to console Ethne for the loss of Bishop Lupus.

"He is not lost," she said, with a triumphant smile in her dark-grey eyes. "Attila will not harm him."

"Your heart has room even for the Hun," he replied, remembering his first sight of her beside the dying boy at Orleans.

"The Huns are terrible heathen, I fear," she said, "but they do seem to know the saints of God when they see them. At least they are not what Patrick calls apostate Christians."

"No," he replied, very gravely. "Attila does seem to recognize a saint; and, alas! he has seen so many apostate or unworthy Christians. Think of Chrysaphius, the minister of the Emperor of the East, trying to bribe Attila's own ambassadors and friends, and to assassinate him treacherously; and think of Attila finding it out, yet, when the embassy charged with the base project came to him in his camp beyond the Danube, being magnanimous enough to distinguish between the villains who planned the treachery, and the envoys who were sent to carry it out without knowing what they were doing. It was not like an ordinary savage to let one of that embassy escape."

Ethne sighed.

"How indeed was Attila to know that to be a Christian means to love good and hate evil? The Huns are not devils; for the devils did wrong when they knew what they were doing. And how were the Huns to know? And even if they were devils," she added, "Patrick has taught us the Name before which the devils fly."

"In the Creed?" he said.

"In the Creed," she replied, "and in Patrick's own hymn."

"What is Patrick's hymn?" he asked.

"I thought all Christians knew Patrick's hymn," she said, with some surprise, and she began to chant softly some of her beloved Irish lorica and "breastplate."

"But I do not know your language," he said.

Ethne translated—"'Christ at my right hand, at my left; Christ in the fort, in the battle, on the sea; by the way, at the end.' Is it not sure to be so with all Christians? Is it not sure to be so with the holy Bishop Lupus?"

He hesitated a moment, and then said—

"Christ our Lord suffers some very hard things to happen to His Christians."

"I know. We were told so," she answered. "He said so. But the hymn says He is with us on all the ways, however rough; and certainly always at the end, however dark."

He was silent. Her faith and hope were stealing like sunshine into his heart, but, like the sunshine, silently.

"I am going with my soldiers," he said, after a pause, "to keep them from oppressing the poor peasants. The Huns have robbed them of nearly everything, and an army of hungry men following the Huns must not be suffered to take the little that is left."

"I know," she said, with a flash of quick sympathy; "the Huns are not the only robbers. The people seem to suffer everywhere, from every one. Baithene has heard them say the misery was there long before the Huns came. There are the tax-gatherers and the slave-masters everywhere."

"Everywhere," Marius replied, "and always."

"And you will help the oppressed and save them from the oppressors?" she said, her whole face lighting up, the royal heart going forth to the poor

and the down-trodden.

“I will try,” he said; “I am going back to Rome.”

“They are taking us there also,” she said; and she parted from him with a smile which was to him as an illumination from heaven.

He wrote to his sister—“The wound was worse than I knew. But I have had tender care and nursing in the house of a Jew called Eleazar, from his wife Miriam, and from two young Christian captives, and I am quite strong again. And, beloved, I think I have found the Fountain of Youth at last; and I hope may bring some drops to thee also. Tell my mother of these two young Christian captives, son and daughter of a king or chieftain from the farthest West, the Scottish-land, Hibernia, the island Rome never conquered. They were kidnapped by British pirates, and bought by Eleazar, an aged Jew, who with his wife Miriam lives at Rome, and is taking them thither. They must be ransomed. Farewell.”

CHAPTER XII.
ST. PATRICK'S CHILDREN IN ST. LEO'S CITY.

reat was the exultation in Rome at the news of the victory on the Catalaunian plains, the defeat of Attila, and his retreat with his Huns to their camps beyond the Danube.

The echo of the triumph soon reached the quiet portico of the palace on the Aventine, where Damaris and Lucia were sitting together in the hush of a July noon. Fabricius came in with the news.

"Attila is in retreat; there has been a battle, with the slaughter of hundreds of thousands, and here is a letter for thee."

It was the one Marius had written from the battle-field. In a few days followed the second from Troyes. It was to Lucia, and she read it as they sat together in the quiet evening.

"'The wound was worse than I knew.'"

"I felt sure of that," said the mother.

"'But I have had tender care and nursing in the house of a Jew called Eleazar, from his wife Miriam and two young Christian captives.'"

"In the house of a Jew!" exclaimed Fabricius, doubtfully. "God grant they dealt fairly by him. The Jews have many wrongs to avenge on us and ours."

Lucia read on—"'I am quite strong again,'" and then she paused a moment before she proceeded, "'I think I have found the Fountain of Youth, and I hope to bring some drops home to thee.'"

"A curious mixture of religions," said Fabricius. "A Jew, and the old Pagan fountain. What can he mean?"

"He means, I suppose," said Lucia, "that the world around us seems rather old, and that he has found among these new people some freshness of new life."

"I understand," said Damaris.

Lucia read on—"'Tell my mother of the two young Christian captives, the son and daughter of a king or chieftain from the farthest West, the land of the Scots, Hibernia, the island Rome never conquered. They were kidnapped by British pirates, and bought by the old Jew Eleazar, who, with his wife Miriam, lives at Rome, and is taking them thither. They must be ransomed.'"

"It seems a very wild story," said Fabricius. "Are you quite sure it is from Marius?"

"Quite sure," said Lucia; and she resumed, "There is a postscript. He thinks the sister would be delightful to me, and that the brother would be invaluable to our father on his lands among the Sabine hills. There is also a dog, a deer-hound of the purest Scottish breed, that he thinks would be priceless for the chase."

"A wonderful treasure-trove, in good sooth," said Fabricius, rather grimly. "A dog, two captives to ransom, and a Fountain of Youth."

Afterwards he said to his wife when they were alone, "Dilectissima, understandest thou what this means? Art thou ready to have thy youth renewed by a daughter-in-law from the Scottish wilds?"

"We will wait and see," she replied. "Marius is no dreamer. If he thinks he has found a treasure, I believe he has."

"The Scots are many of them Pelagian heretics," Fabricius replied, not without malice.

"Then we must bring them under the instruction of our Pope Leo," she said. "We will wait and see."

They had not long to wait. The very next evening Damaris and Lucia were in their lectica, with its purple curtains and golden lattices, on the great road leading northward, when they met a little company of four, walking beside two strong, heavily-laden mules. The old man who led the way, walking alone, had the dark, Oriental colouring and aquiline features which they recognized as Hebrew. Behind him walked two women, with veils drawn around the head and shoulders, one dark and stooping slightly with age, the other tall and young and fair, with a sweet light in the grey eyes which met those of Damaris. Behind them came a fair, athletic young man, holding a powerful deer-hound in leash.

Damaris and Lucia looked significantly at each other. They would have followed the strangers, but their horses had suddenly changed their pace, and were galloping towards the hills, rocking the heavy carriage (or highly-decorated wagon) from side to side. The mother and daughter had not a doubt that, as in a momentary flash of lightning, they had seen the group described in Marius' letter. As they drove on they met a troop of the slaves of the Imperial household.

Meantime in the opposite direction the little company they had met entered the gate of the city, and were passed by the same troop of the Imperial household.

The officer who was at the head of the band of slaves seemed struck by the four travellers, so contrasted in types of face and figure, and yet so evidently belonging to each other. Especially he fixed his eyes on the fair face of Ethne, the athletic form of Baithene, and the dog of the much-prized Irish breed. After he had passed them he turned back, and asked Eleazar where he lived, and if the dog was to be purchased, and said he might look in some day and inquire about it.

Something in the officer's look and bearing made Ethne look down and draw closer to Miriam, and Baithene look up defiantly and throw his arm around the dog, whilst the dog pricked up his ears, and gave a suspicious low growl.

When they reached Eleazar's lodging at the top of a tall house on the further side of the Tiber, where many of his countrymen congregated, and had separated into their different rooms for the night, Ethne said to her brother—

"Have you the tablet the Roman soldier at Troyes gave us for his mother and father, who live in a palace on one of these hills?"

"Surely," he said; "why do you ask?"

"I can scarcely say why," she answered, with a shiver. "But this great Rome seems to me lonelier than the sea, and stranger than our first step into a strange land, and more like a den of lions than besieged Orleans or the camp of the Huns. The people look at us so strangely, as if we were foreign animals, or pieces of merchandise for sale."

"And *we are*!" moaned Baithene.

"Let us say the paternoster and Patrick's hymn," she rejoined, "and try and go to sleep." But they slept little.

Nor did Miriam and Eleazar sleep much better.

"Dost thou know that man with the sinister face," she said, "who spoke to thee about the dog to-day?"

"No," he replied, "save that he is of the Imperial household, and must not be offended."

"He must be *escaped*," she replied decidedly. "It is not the dog only that he wants, and he looks a son of Belial. The Imperial household is said to be a sink of iniquity; we must never sell these children into that."

He was silent; heart and conscience were with her, but he murmured sullenly—

"I told thee these Gentile strangers were no merchandise for us."

"The God of the fatherless sent them to us," she replied; "and our own child is fatherless and motherless; and if we suffer God's orphans to be ruined, how are we to ask Him to care for our own?"

"We are no princes now," he answered, "to have young men and maidens in our service, and beasts of the chase. What would you do?"

"They have a tablet from that young Roman officer," she said. "A letter to his family in a palace on the Aventine."

"What of that?" he grumbled.

"I will go to-morrow," she said, "with the maiden, to see the lady on the Aventine, the young Roman noble's mother, and tell her all. Perchance she will have compassion on these Christian captives, and help them and us."

"Thou wilt do what seemeth thee best," he rejoined, in a tone of oppressed acquiescence. "If we are ruined, we are ruined; and the All-Merciful have mercy on thee and our lost child."

Miriam, having gained her point, was too wise to prolong the debate and imperil the victory, which was, she well knew, the victory of his own conscience, by the most brilliant or devout retort.

So the next morning early she gently tapped at the door of the rooms where the young captives were, and said—

"Put on thy raiment quietly, my daughter, and bring the tablet the young Roman gave thee, and come with me, and let thy brother and the dog follow close behind."

In the dusk of the morning they crossed the Tiber, and gliding along the silent quays at the foot of the Aventine, climbed from their level between the walls of the vineyard and palace gardens till they reached the gate of the house of Fabricius.

Eleazar came after them, and stood near them at the gate, in the shadow, a little apart. One or two slaves were stirring, and seemed at first determined not to heed them, but in a few minutes the steward of the household appeared, and demanded what they wanted at that unseasonable hour.

"We want thee to bear this epistle instantly to thy lady," said Miriam; "it is from her son. He gave it us at the city of Troyes, far away in Gaul, to bring hither to her."

The steward looked doubtfully at the group, but nevertheless accepted the tablet, went quickly into the house, and in a few minutes returned with his young mistress. Lucia's smile reassured them.

"Does the matter press?" she asked.

"It presses sore," was Miriam's reply. "A few hours' delay may prove the ruin of two innocent lives."

Lucia went instantly to her mother's room.

"Mother," she said, "it is the people we met yesterday, the people who nursed Marius, with a letter from him."

Together they glanced at the few words in the letter from Marius, commending the fugitives to the care of his father and mother. In a few minutes Damaris and Lucia received the strangers in the atrium. Miriam asked to see Damaris apart, and few words of explanation were needed between them.

"My husband purchased these captives on the coast of Gaul," she said. "They are noble. They were taken by pirates. They are Christians. They are good. Lady, save them from becoming slaves in the household of the Emperor. One of his people has seen them, and is coming, I fear, to purchase them to-day."

"It must not be," said Damaris. "What would you have us do?"

"Ransom them, purchase them, lady; make them your own. They belong to your Christ!"

"You are not Christian?" Damaris asked courteously.

"My family are of the tribe of Judah—of the family of your Christ. Christians robbed us of all, of our only child. But I believe your Christ was good."

Damaris looked into the dark, sad, Oriental eyes and read much there. After a moment's pause she took Miriam's hand.

“You have pity on these captives,” she said tenderly, “as your great prophets commanded you; you know the heart of a captive. You have pity on this maiden for the sake of your own dead maiden child.”

“Our daughter is not dead,” exclaimed Miriam, with a tremulous voice. “But she is a captive, perhaps a slave, we know not where. We search for her year after year. We pray for her night and day. There is One Who lives and hears.”

“One Who sees and loves!” responded Damaris; “Who sees thee caring for these His children, and I believe brings them through thee to me. I will do all I can.”

She went straight to her husband, who was in consultation with his steward, in his room of business. After dismissing the attendant, she said,

“Fabricius, these captives, the friends of Marius, who helped to save his life, are here. We shall have to ransom them at once.”

“My lady is imperious,” he replied, smiling, “and must of course be obeyed. But where are the revenues? The taxes and imposts for these wars are ruinous. Only just now the forester from our farms on the Sabine hills has been telling me the slaves will not work. They are probably meditating another flight to the barbarians, as in the days of Alaric, and everything is going to ruin.

“We must sell some of our land,” she said.

“No one will buy,” he replied. “They say Attila the Hun will soon return to avenge his defeat and ravage the country.”

“I will part with my jewels,” she said.

He made a deprecatory gesture, and said—

“I was but pointing out to thee we were not Olympians to command the clouds, nor, alas! of those who found the tribute-money miraculously stored in the mouths of fishes. What thou commandest must certainly be done. But what can then be done with the captives we shall have to see.”

They returned together to the atrium, and Fabricius, addressing Baithene, said gravely—

“My son writes that thou art a prince in thine own land. I fear we have too many princes here already to have much room for more.”

“I am no prince now,” said Baithene, raising his frank, fearless eyes to Fabricius, “at least I have no kingdom and no subjects; and what we call a kingdom in our country would perhaps seem but a wilderness to thee.”

There was no complaining in his tone, simply the acknowledgment of an unpleasant fact; and no defiance in his look, only a kind of princely sense that nothing could rob him of his birthright, or change what he was in himself, or prevent his conquering circumstances by making the best of them.

The old Roman patrician was touched, he felt he had met an equal; but all he said was—

“Thy dog, at all events, seems a prince of dogs.”

And Bran acknowledged the compliment by an acquiescent wag of his tail.

Then turning to Miriam, Fabricius said—“I would see thy husband.”

“I will fetch him at once,” she replied. And without another word she went and brought in Eleazar, who was still keeping guard outside the gate.

Fabricius took the old man to his private room, and as a matter of course there was some bargaining between them. The Roman noble pleaded with much truth the badness of the times; the Jewish merchant pleaded with much plausibility the poverty of his race, and his own especial losses on this purchase. But the arrangement was soon concluded; and Eleazar and Miriam returned alone to the tall houses beyond the Tiber, leaving Ethne, Baithene, and the dog in the palace on the Aventine.

As Miriam went, she bowed with an Oriental gesture, and kissed the hand of Damaris.

“Your Christ is good,” she murmured with a quivering voice, “and so are some of His Christians.”

“Our Christ is yours!” said Damaris, in a low voice.

Miriam made no reply for a moment, and then with passionate intensity she said—

“Pray to your God and ours, that if your Christ is ours we may know it in time, I and my husband, and our captive child whom we have lost.”

CHAPTER XIII.
SUNSET MEETING DAWN.

hen Eleazar and Miriam had left, Fabricius took Baithene and the dog into quarters of their own; whilst Damaris led Ethne within into her own rooms.

"My child," she said, "you have been used to be served by others, not to serve. The change must have been hard."

"The service of our own people was always willing," replied Ethne, the colour deepening on her fair cheek. "And I have tried to make my service willing; and then it is not hard."

"You have heard of the Lord of all, Who became servant of all?" said Damaris, tenderly; and Ethne replied, her whole face lighting up—

"Patrick told us of the King of men, Who saw that all men were in bondage, and gave His life a ransom for all; and he told us how He came to serve us all, and that His sacrifice and His service were all willing. And our Patrick was himself once a slave, and knows what it means. Besides," she added, "it could never be hard to serve Miriam, she was so good to us, and so sad."

"Her name is Miriam?" Damaris asked.

"Yes," said Ethne; "and I thought that name was the same as the blessed Mother's name, and that made it sweeter to serve her."

Damaris took the girl's hand and pressed it to her heart as she replied—

"Thy Miriam looks very worn and sad."

"Yes; and that, of course, makes me love her more. She has lost her only child, and she does not seem to have quite found our Christ."

"Child," said Damaris, "our Christ is everything to thee?"

"Yes," replied Ethne, simply, "He is everything. We are Christians."

"Could you not tell Miriam of Him?" said Damaris.

"I tried," was Ethne's answer; "and she wept, and said she saw I had found the Messiah, who is called the Christ, and that it gave me a wonderful joy. There was no need to say much. She saw. But," she added, "Patrick told us there are two Testaments of God. And Miriam seems only to know the first, the beginning; she has not learned the end yet."

"The Testaments of God are all your learning?" Damaris said.

"They are the only books we know," Ethne replied.

"Happy child," said Damaris, "to have had only the fountains to drink from."

"But here, where the fountains have been overflowing, they say, so long," replied Ethne, "we are hoping to learn so much! And then, if ever we go home again——" But there she stopped; the words would not come.

"You have a home, father and mother?" Damaris asked.

"We *had*," sobbed Ethne; "and oh! I trust we have still! If only we could know! Patrick said in his letter, that the pirates killed many when they took us captive; and Dewi, the British sailor, who was one of them, promised to go home and tell our people of us, and then to come back and find us out, and tell us of them. And if God helps him he will."

Damaris laid the fair head on her shoulder, and gradually the whole story came out. They were interrupted by a bell sounding from the oratory which had belonged to Marcella and the Ecclesia Domestica of the Aventine; and they all went thither, and knelt together for the morning prayer.

Afterwards, while the brother and sister had their morning meal together, Damaris and Fabricius consulted what should be done with them. It was clear from what Miriam had said, and Baithene confirmed, that the eyes of one of the officers of the Emperor's household had rested covetously on the three, that is, the youth, the maiden, and the dog, and that they must as little as possible for the present be seen in public together.

It was decided, therefore, that Fabricius should take Baithene and the dog to a country house belonging to the family among the Sabine hills, near Nero's villa of Sublacum (Subiaco), whilst Ethne should remain with Damaris and Lucia on the Aventine. To restore them to their home in the far-off Western isle, while so much of the intervening continent was ravaged by barbarian tribes, or infested by Imperial armies and officials, often worse than the barbarians, was at present out of the question. The safest course for the captives, it was concluded, was to treat them as part of the property and household of Fabricius, under such protection as his patrician and senatorial rank could give. This decision was communicated to the brother and sister as the only possible course to be taken at the moment.

"But peril is nothing to us," Baithene said appealingly, "if only we could reach our own land again."

"It is for your sister that the peril involved in such a journey cannot be encountered!" Fabricius replied.

"But surely," Ethne ventured to plead, "if it is His way, God will guard us in it."

"It is *not* the Divine way," rejoined Fabricius, with Roman imperiousness. "For it is not *ours* for you. God has committed you to us, and we have to guard you as our own."

And Damaris added—

"Who knows how soon your friend the British sailor may find you out, and bring you tidings which may guide us all?"

Baithene acknowledged the right of ransom and the law of honour, whilst Ethne felt the claim of gratitude and the persuasion of hope and loving-kindness. And so the two were gathered under the sacred *patria potestas* of the father of the Roman household.

It was a wonderful time for Ethne, those months with Damaris and Lucia. From the limited past of her own Irish clan she was suddenly transferred into the past of the whole civilized world, Greek and Roman, besides the link with the ancient East through Miriam, whom she often saw.

And not less wonderful were those months to Damaris and Lucia. It was as if through a cleft in the far-off mountain walls of some Norwegian fiord they saw the sunset melting into dawn, the fading glory of the old world kindling into the fervent glow of the new.

"I understand what thou hast written," Lucia wrote to Marius, still detained in Gaul. "I also have found the Fountain of Youth."

The past of ancient Rome—Republican, Imperial, Pagan, Christian—stood visibly before the young Irish girl. On the Capitol, around the Forum throughout the city, still rose the ancient temples, despoiled indeed of many of their statues and shrines, and no longer devoted to the worship of the ancient gods, but still standing, not turned to other uses. The temple where the Vestal Virgins had kept the fire of Vesta ever burning, the sacred hearth-fire of Rome, and the cells where they had lived, were still there. Only forty years before, the last of the Vestals had cursed, with a curse of which most men still believed the power, Serena, niece of the great Theodosius, when she dared, in the temple on the Capitol, to take the jewelled necklace from the neck of Rhea, Mother of the Gods, and place it on her own. The Vestal Virgins, the ancient gods and goddesses, all were gone, but the sacrilegious Serena, alas! people still said with awe, had been put to a violent death.

The palaces on the Palatine were still Imperial dwellings. The Pantheon was not yet consecrated to Christian worship. They were indeed empty of shrines and worshippers, those grand old temples; but they were still there, whether awaiting the return of the old gods, or the consecration of Christian worship, or mere destruction, not a few still doubted. August presences seemed to many still to hover round them, whether good or evil, still mighty to avenge if not to save.

And there stood the Coliseum, a continual gathering-place of all Rome, attracted thither day by day by the tumultuous excitement of the games and races.

Early one morning Damaris took Ethne there. With triumph she pointed out how that arena was never more to be stained with the blood of martyrs or gladiators. Eagerly Ethne drank in the stories of the Christian martyrs, rejoicing to go by any path to Christ, fearlessly awaiting the opening of the cages of the lions. Especially she delighted in the last martyr story of the Coliseum, which had closed the gladiatorial games for ever.

"I was a little child of seven," Damaris said; "but I remember to this day how my father came back, and told us of the unknown Egyptian monk who had suddenly flashed on the world from the solitudes of his African deserts, and had stood in the arena between the combatants with outstretched arms pleading for the slaughter to cease; how for the moment there was a pause in the onset of the gladiators, a hush in the fierce shouts of the spectators; and then a fiercer yell than ever, showers of stones hurled at the monk, until he fell, crushed to death, until the last Christian martyr had fallen at what his martyrdom made the last gladiatorial show. The cry of wrong from the great city had pierced the monk's heart in his African solitudes, and driven him, alone, across desert and sea, to stop it; and that great sacrifice of pity had pierced the heart of the Emperor. And so one more great wrong was swept out of the world for ever."

"Do all the great wrongs die in that way," asked Ethne, "by some one dying under them?"

"The Cross is on our Christian banners!" said Damaris. "Of what wrongs were you thinking?"

"I was thinking of Troyes," Ethne replied, "of the young deacon falling under the spears of the Huns, of the aged Bishop Lupus giving himself up to Attila, and of the city being saved. And," she added, softly, "I was thinking also of the great wrong of slavery, and of Patrick, who brought the freedom of Christ to our country, having been himself once a slave."

Damaris looked at the girl very tenderly, but as if a new light had suddenly dawned on her. Slavery was so essential a part of that old civilization, Greek and Roman, that even to her it had scarcely occurred that it was anything but an inevitable natural evil, like earthquakes and storms; but she said nothing.

A very close sympathy bound these two to each other; they seemed so often to read each other's thoughts, and in doing so to find their own grow clearer. Many were the galleries of the past through which Damaris led Ethne. The great poems of the ancient world were unlocked at her touch, one palace chamber after another; especially the great poems of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the poems of the Battle and the Wandering. Ethne would say they explained so much, since the battles and the wanderings seem always there.

And Lucia would answer—

"Does not that make you sad?"

And Ethne would say—

"Why should it? We have the *key*, now! We know that the wanderings are pilgrimages to the home, and the battles may always be victories."

"But we cannot always see the victory," Lucia said.

And Ethne—"How could it be a battle still if we did?"

Then there was the story of Prometheus, the bound Titan, with its mighty entangled reverberations of the great revolt and the great redemption. So Ethne's world of thought grew into order to the music of the great voices. Of the feeble, imitative echoes of the present happily she heard little.

Also in that memorable winter Ethne accomplished the great elementary step of learning to read. And the gentle strains of Virgil went deep into her heart, as afterwards into the hearts of so many of the saints of her own race. Fortunately for her there was only one literary language then to learn, and it was something to learn Latin as a household speech from those to whom it was the natural language of their infancy.

But dearest of all to Ethne was the translation of "the Testaments of God" into the vulgar tongue by Jerome, the Jerome who had written letters to the kindred of Damaris, and had prayed and preached in the oratory on the Aventine, where they worshipped every day.

One day Lucia entering Ethne's chamber found her kneeling by a table entirely absorbed in a manuscript.

“What new treasure have you found?” Lucia asked.

“Another of the great poems,” said Ethne, with a smile in her luminous eyes. “Miriam told me something of it. It is about a great chieftain who was good to every one, and honoured by his clan and all the clans around, and beloved by God; and yet he lost everything, and every one he loved, because the devil hated him, and God listened to the devil, and seemed to forsake him.”

“You mean Job,” said Lucia, rather drearily. “We have all heard of the patience of Job.”

“But that is the interest of it,” Ethne said. “He must have been patient really, for God said so at the end. But there was no dullness in his patience. He said terrible things about the world and even about God in his anguish—just the things that come into every one’s heart in great anguish.”

“So it always seemed to me,” Lucia observed with some hesitation. “But how does that help us? We are not allowed to say such things.”

“It is all the help in the world,” said Ethne. “That old chieftain could not be untrue. The other chiefs preached at him in all his pain and anguish, and kept saying, ‘The world is all right, and every one gets what he deserves.’ And Job said, ‘The world is anything but right, and people don’t get what they deserve.’ And the delight is to see that God was pleased not with the chiefs who meant to flatter Him by saying His world was going on all right, but with poor tortured Job, who found fault with it—even, it almost seemed, with Himself. We do dare sometimes to say the hardest things to those we love best.”

“But,” said Lucia, coming out with a problem which had vexed her in secret long, “how can that comfort us? God did not explain. He only said, ‘I am strong, and wise, and eternal, and you are frail and blind, and but for a moment.’ Is that any comfort?”

Ethne was silent for a time, and then she said—

“I suppose it is, if we love Him enough! It seems to me God never does explain. But He said that poor old chieftain had spoken right for Him and understood Him, and He must have known. That certainly must have comforted Job. And God told Job to make sacrifices for his friends who were so pleased with themselves. And it *is* a comfort to have people who are too much pleased with themselves set right; and the greatest comfort of all to be able to do good to those who have hurt us. Perhaps also it put the friends right too at last.”

“Job had also his riches back, and other children instead of those he had lost,” said Lucia.

“I do not see much comfort in that,” said Ethne; “the lost *things* may be replaced, but we always want the *same* lost *people* back, not new ones.”

“Hast thou no room for any new people?” Lucia said. “Have you no room for us?” and she clasped Ethne’s hands.

Ethne returned the caress, but rather parenthetically; and with a far-off look in the deep grey eyes she resumed—

“Poor old chieftain! That poem does not seem finished; but *we* have the end, you know,” she added.

“The end!” said Lucia. “Where?” wondering if Ethne had discovered a new book of the Holy Scriptures in her far country.

“In the Four Gospels,” said Ethne, “in the Cross. *We* do not need, of course, that God should explain Himself. He has sent His Son.”

The winter passed rapidly away. At first they did not venture to take Ethne amongst the great congregations in the basilicas; but occasionally, as time went on, and also her Latin grew stronger, learned naturally in the every-day speech of the home, they took her to some quiet corner of the great churches, to hear one of the great sermons of Leo; and so, gradually, the conviction dawned on her as she stood among the hushed multitudes, and listened to the strong, plain words of the great Bishop, that Rome, like Troyes, had also her great living saint. The heresies he refuted were indeed unknown to her; to her his eloquent, clear exposition of the Faith in the Incarnate Lord was but an unfolding of what she had been taught in the simple creed and hymn of Patrick, guarded, as she felt, against foes she knew not; but guarded by simply strengthening wall and buttress of the great fortress of truth, within which she had already found rest.

The Christian catacombs also had the deepest interest for Ethne; they never seemed to have any gloom for the young girl. The radiance of the presence of the Good Shepherd, painted on the walls, seemed to make them warm and bright for her. The Shepherd with the sheep and lambs gathered around his feet, and in one place with the lost kid of the goats on His shoulder; the music of the young Orpheus (also on those frescoed walls), in his immortal youth, filled all the silent chambers.

“Christ, our Orpheus, is for ever gathering the living stones into the Holy City by His music,” Damaris said; “from the wildernesses of the far West, from the ruins of Rome, from the Egyptian deserts of Telemachus.”

“And for ever making the world young again,” said Lucia; “as He has now sent you into our old world to make it new again for us.”

“It does not seem old to me,” said Ethne.

“How should it?” said Lucia. “Does the spring-tide ever leave the world old? Do the fountains of living water ever know what drought means?”

They read to her from the rough old Greek letters the inscriptions, “*In peace*,” “*Thou livest*,” “Mayest thou live *in God*.”

“It is the story of the princesses of our race, the story of our Ethne the Fair and Fedelma the Ruddy. They said to Patrick, ‘Give us to see the Son, our Spouse,’ and they received the Eucharist of God, and they saw the Son, their Spouse, and they slept in peace.”

Once Miriam took the girl into one of the catacombs of her own people; and there also she saw in the square, strange characters the word which Miriam told her meant “Peace” in the Hebrew; also the dove with the olive branch as in the Christian tombs, and the rocky couch or ledge like that on which the angels called the Magdalene to look and see where they had laid the Lord.

“No more a tomb, but only a night’s resting-place for us since He laid there,” Ethne said.

And Miriam answered with mournful hesitation—

“They said the disciples stole Him away.”

“They did not steal Him away,” Ethne replied; “nor did He steal away from death! He met death and conquered it for us, for all, for ever.”

For Ethne, nothing was in the realm of death; there was no dead past for her; back through all the ages lived that immortal life of the living Word. There was no world of shades for her; the world of the dead had become “the land of the living.”

CHAPTER XIV.
ROME AND HER SAINT.

hile Ethne was thus becoming at home in the Aventine palace, a true daughter of the heart to Damaris, Baithene had become a stay and companion to Fabricius, such as he had scarcely known before. Baithene came to them from a simpler world than theirs, which seemed to bring back to the old Roman the nobleness and simplicity of old Rome. These children came to them both unperplexed by the confused voices of the later civilization, so feeble and so corrupt; and, moreover, without weighing on them with the responsibility which they felt anxiously with regard to their own children. And therefore they could fill up gaps and voids in their own life and thought as none brought up under the same influences could have done. The simpler world of the Sabine farm was also home-like to Baithene.

Of the great empire, so tangled, so chaotic, with the germs of a new world no one could then foresee struggling into life through the decay of the old world crumbling to corruption, he could understand little. The miles of pasture and forest, the lakes and torrents among those Sabine hills, were to him like the hills and valleys of his own land. Every day there were trees to be felled, or fields to be tilled; and there was also the chase, of the beasts of prey, wolves and bears, with Bran in his element as an *aide-de-camp*. There were also men and women to be governed and employed. But here came in a dreary difference. Instead of men and women bound to him and his with the loyalty to chieftainship and the affection of kinship, those who had to be governed here were all slaves, of many races, linked to each other and their owner by no organic tie, but merely as mechanical atoms welded together by frost and fire. The worst evils of slavery were indeed mitigated there. Fabricius and Damaris were Christians; the estate was not too large for the servants of the household to be attached personally to them, and many of the labourers had wives and families held together, as in olden days no slaves could be, by the sanctity of Christian marriage.

The evils of the Latifundia, the enormous farms, with the Ergastula, the workhouses inhabited by great gangs of celibate slaves under a slave-driver, were greatly modified on Fabricius' land. But nevertheless the relations between employer and employed were those of slavery; and whether worked out mercifully or not, it was from Roman households that forty thousand Gothic slaves had fled forty years before to Alaric, at the first chance of liberation.

Baithene felt, in a dim way, that however rude and undeveloped might be the social life in his own land, it was living and organic, and therefore capable of growth; whereas this was a mere mechanical conglomeration, always inwardly crumbling away, and ready at any blow from without to be shattered in a moment into ruin. Yet, not being responsible for it himself, and being in his small way royal, the largeness of heart and the habit of caring for others remained with him, so that he contrived to diffuse a good deal of life and interest and even gaiety around him, and thus greatly to relieve Fabricius.

When in a few months it was deemed safe for Baithene to return to the Aventine with the dog and Fabricius, the company of slaves who came with them had become eager to render him willing service, knowing that he would demand nothing but what was right, and that he would give all that was possible; they had also become responsive to his gay words and smile, knowing that he had not only that light-heartedness which took troubles lightly, but also the faculty of flashing into lightnings of indignation against injustice and wrong. He found his sister also, in her place, the depositary of the joys and sorrows of the household, old and young; both of them having conquered the hearts around them by their old princely way of considering what every one needed and liked, and by their new Christian way of ruling, not by dividing but by uniting, of reigning by serving.

The return of Fabricius and Baithene brought Ethne and the whole family more into the outerworld. The life of Damaris, loving and natural as it was, had become essentially a life of religion; her pleasures were in her works of mercy, visiting the sick, helping the destitute, lifting up the fallen—services in which Ethne delighted to share.

"The world," in the Rome of those days, was for the most part so undeniably wicked and unlovely, its amusements so ugly, its vices so putrefying, that to come out of it seemed not merely the only safe, but the only cheerful and tolerable road to take. And to Lucia and Ethne, the mere gaiety of their youth, the beauty of flowers, the mere joy of living, singing like birds, dancing like young fawns, especially now that they danced and sang and lived together, were quite pleasure enough.

But when Fabricius came there had to be entertainments, visits, attentions to and from the great houses connected with them; and this necessarily made the position of the Irish captives more complicated and difficult.

It was a great joy to the brother and sister to be together again; and the rapture of Bran (the dog) at finding his young mistress again as he crouched at her feet, and bounded round her, and gravely placed his great paws on her shoulder, expressing his feelings with every possible movement of tail and ears, and every possible variety of bark, and cry, and whine, quite raised him out of the category of dumb beasts.

Baithene and Ethne had much to compare. All kinds of new questions, social and ecclesiastical, had arisen before them; the world divided itself so differently here from the old classifications of their childhood. "City" and "country" were in themselves new words to them, never having before their capture beheld any collection of houses worthy to be called a town. The terms "master" and "slave" were not so altogether new, since in Ireland also captives were held in bondage, and their own Patrick had been once a slave. But that the whole class of owners and employers should be slave-owners, and the whole class of labourers and servants slaves, with no natural human links between them of clan or race, was indeed new. As to the Church, there was less to perplex them, since from the beginning they had been brought face to face with the great perplexity of all times, that so many Christians were not in the least Christ-like. Heretics indeed they heard of, of various degrees and names—Arian, semi-Arian, Pelagian, semi-Pelagian, Nestorian, Eutychian, Manichean; but these seemed to them mostly of foreign growth: the Arians chiefly Gothic; the Eutychians (whatever that might mean) chiefly from the East; the Manicheans chiefly from Africa; the Pelagians from their own West, from the Britanniæ, the land of the pirates who had captured them. Rome had seldom originated the great heretics or the great theologians. And, moreover, of all these confusions the brother and sister had chiefly heard through a voice ringing clear, simple, sonorous above all the tumult like the voice of their own Patrick; and that was the voice of Leo, Bishop Leo, Pope Leo, Leo the Great of Rome. Lupus they knew was called Pope at Troyes, and Anianus at Orleans; but this Leo it seemed was pope and father of a wider world. Rome herself, many years before, they were told, the restless, divided city,

had waited in peace for forty days, during his absence after his election, united in the unanimous choice of him as her shepherd and guide. And ever since in all perplexities she had always turned to him, never absent, as her defender and real lord; rock of strength amidst all the tossings of the waves and all the crumblings of the strongholds. Ethne said to Baithene—

"It seems as though God had sent Leo to Rome, as He sent Patrick to Ireland. If ever thou, beloved, were to take Holy Orders in this strange land surely it would be Leo's hands that would consecrate thee."

"Leo's hands would never consecrate me!" he replied, with a slight touch of bitterness unusual with him. "Have I not been, and am I not still, a slave? And Leo does not admit slaves to the priesthood. They told me amid the Sabine hills that he wrote to the bishops of Campania, that 'a servile meanness made some slaves seek the honour of the priesthood, seeking that they who found no approval from man might find approval from God; but the sacred ministry,' he said, 'would be polluted by the meanness of such association. None who are bound to the service of others' (*qui originali aut alicui conditione obligati sunt*), he wrote, 'or in any way not free by birth or station, was fit to serve in the camp of God.'"[2]

"But Patrick was a slave!" she exclaimed.

"Patrick was born free," he replied.

"But thou also wert born free!" she said, her face brightening. "Leo could never mean to exclude such as thee!"

"I know not, little sister," he replied. "Many indeed of the slaves of the Romans are captives born free, but the Roman law gives the purchaser indelible rights over the purchased."

Ethne's eyes filled with tears.

"Does Christianity itself, even the Heavenly City, which is free, and the mother of us all, turn against us? Is there no refuge at all in this world for the wronged?"

"As thou sayest," he replied, "the heavenly Jerusalem is free; we shall all be free there. And here we can always be free in soul! Moreover," he added, "slavery does often indeed degrade the slave, and make him through all his being slavish and unfit for any high office. And on me, beloved, this does not weigh heavily after all. God helping us, we have another calling, the old reigning and serving for our own people."

"At all events," said Ethne, "we may add Leo's prayer to Patrick's hymn—'Grant us the spirit to think and do always such things as be rightful, that we who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will.' It is the great Bishop's prayer for us, and for himself," she added; "let us say it together for him as well as for ourselves."

The entertainments, banquets, and visits of state occasioned by the return of Fabricius to Rome, necessarily made the position of the Irish captives more difficult. Although their being members of the Aventine household was their best protection, Fabricius and Damaris could not bear to have them regarded as in bondage; and yet as guests the world could not receive them.

Christmas was drawing near, with many of the old pagan festivities, as well as those of the Christian Church, gathered around the season. But to the Irish captives it brought no festive home gatherings—this their first Christian Christmas, their first homeless New Year. To them, therefore, all that was festive in the season was concentrated entirely in the great Festival of the Nativity. Their home was in the home of the Holy Childhood of the Child Jesus and the Mother Mary. The great stately basilicas were as a family hearth to these fatherless and motherless exiles, and the words of Bishop Leo on the Incarnation were as a father's welcome to them.

"You know well, dilectissimi," Leo said, "and have frequently heard the things which belong to the sacred observance of this day's solemnity. But as this visible light affords pleasure to uninjured eyes, so do sound hearts receive perpetual joy from the Nativity of the Saviour. Wherefore we must never be silent, though we cannot set it forth as it deserves."[3]

Then he spoke of "the general Confession common to all, whereby the whole body of the faithful saythey believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, Who was born of the Holy Ghost and of the Virgin Mary; by which three clauses," he said, "the engines o attack of all the heretics are shattered."[4]

And Ethne and Baithene, who knew the Confession well, although they knew little of the heretics, felt warm and safe as birds in their own nest within the sacred walls, which kept them safe from all these battering-rams.

Again Leo said—

"Lowliness was taken up by Majesty, weakness by Power, mortality by Eternity; and in order to pay the debt of our corruption, the inviolable nature was united to that which could suffer.

"In the entire and perfect nature of very man was born the very God; whole, in what was His; whole, in what was ours. By*ours* we mean what the Creator formed in us at the beginning, and what He assumed in order to restore. For of that which the demon brought, which man, by him deceived, admitted, there was not a trace in the Saviour; and the fact that He took on Himself our infirmities did not make Him partaker of our transgressions. He took on Him the form of a servant, of a slave" (at these words Ethne gently touched her brother's arm), "without the defilement of sin, enlarging the human and not diminishing the Divine; for that emptying of Himself whereby the Invisible made Himself visible, and the Creator of all things willed to be one among mortals, was the stooping of compassion, not the failure of power.

"The infancy of the Babe is exhibited by the swaddling clothes; the greatness of the Highest is declared by the voices of angels. To hunger, to thirst, to be weary, is evidently human; but to supply five thousand men with five loaves, and to give to the Samaritan woman that living water of which to drink is never to thirst again,—to walk on the back of the sea with feet that sink not, and to allay the liftings up of the waves tossed by the storm, is unquestionably Divine. To weep over a dead friend is human; by a voice of command to raise him to life again is Divine. It belongs to our nature to hang on the wood of the Cross; and to another to make all the elements tremble when day had been darkened into night. It belongs to humanity to be transfixed with nails; it belongs to Deity to open the gates of Paradise to the faith of the robber.[5]

"Our Lord, the true Shepherd, Who laid down His life for the sheep, and Who came not to destroy men's lives but to save them, wills us to imitate His own loving-kindness."

Such words as these made that season indeed a festival to the captives, rich with the joy the world could not give nor take away, a joy in which they and Damaris and Lucia, and every slave among the hundreds in that great patrician household, could rejoice alike.

Then came the great Festival of the Epiphany, which these children from the Isles of the Gentilesfelt to be especially their own. And again the clear, strong words of Leo rang through the crowded basilica.

“The last holy day which we celebrated was that on which a pure Virgin brought forth the Saviour of mankind. And now, beloved, the venerable Festival of the Epiphany gives us a continuation of joys.

“For the salvation of all men is interested in the fact, that the infancy of the Mediator between God and man was clearly manifested to the whole world whilst it was still detained in an insignificant little town.

“For although He had chosen out the Israelitish nation, and one family of that nation, from which to take on Him the nature of universal humanity, yet it was not His will that the beginnings of His life should be concealed within the narrow limits of his mother’s abode; but as He was pleased to be born for all, He willed to be speedily recognized by all, and accordingly the star appeared to the Magi.

“Lift up, dearly beloved, your faithful minds to the faithful grace of the everlasting light. Follow after that humility, clothe yourself with the strength of patience, that in it you may be able to make your souls your own; for He Who is the redemption of all is Himself the courage of all.”

“Brother,” said Ethne that evening, as they sat alone together, while Fabricius held a great banquet for his kinsmen, “I think I understand about Leo and the slaves. It is only because he has never had the *gift* of being himself a slave. Thank God, our Patrick had been a captive, and so learnt the heart of a captive and a slave. And you see even the All-Merciful had to become one of us, that He might be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.”

Baithene was silent a few minutes, and then he said in a low, deep voice, taking his sister’s hands in his own—

“If ever we are lifted back to our place among the *few*, little sister, God grant we may never lose the lessons learnt by living down among the *many*!”

CHAPTER XV.
RANSOMS AND CAPTIVITIES.

ne winter morning, not long after the Epiphany, when Damaris and Ethne were sitting together quietly reading in a room opening on the long pillared corridor, they were surprised by the angry barking of a dog, followed by cries of pain from a human voice. In a moment Ethne was away.

"It is Bran!" she said; "he is killing something, or some one is killing him; perhaps both."

In a few minutes she returned, with the dog crouching penitently beside her, with apologizing ears and tail, whilst behind her came Marius, leading a roughly-clad stranger, who was slightly limping. It was Dewi, the British sailor.

When the joyful greetings between Marius and his mother and sister were over, they all re-entered the portico, and Dewi threw himself down at Ethne's feet and kissed the hem of her garment. In his arms he carried a large package, which he laid at her feet with every possible expression and gesture of homage.

"What is he saying?" Lucia asked.

"He is only giving me great titles in our own language," said Ethne, "princess, and lady, and I know not what else, and saying we have saved his life now for the second time."

Meantime Bran continued giving out low growls, evidently endeavouring to awaken his friends to danger, with a desponding conviction that his remonstrances were not likely to be attended to.

"What is the dog saying?" Lucia asked, "as you seem to know everybody's language."

"He is reminding us, I suppose, how Dewi gave him a blow with a club when the pirates took us captive."

Then Marius intervened—

"Excuse me, lady!" he said to Ethne and his mother and sister. "The dog hurried the introduction. But to you, mother, I see this lady needs no introduction of mine."

At that moment Fabricius appeared from another door with Baithene. Ethne arose, and clasping her brother's hands, said with quivering voice—

"*They live!* they are well!" and again Dewi's homage was repeated to Baithene; and then he placed in his hands a large bag which he had kept closely wrapped in his plaid.

"What does it all mean?" Fabricius asked, much perplexed by these sudden appearances, and by the various languages, human and canine.

Gradually the explanation came. Marius had found the British sailor on the quay at Marseilles (where he had been staying with his friend the Presbyter Salvian). The poor Briton was vainly endeavouring to make himself understood, and Marius took compassion on him; something in the cadences of his voice made him think of Ethne and Baithene.

After a time an Armorican Breton was found to interpret, and between them at last they came to understand that Dewi had just come from Ireland, and was now on his way to Rome, and was trying to find some vessel to take him to Ostia, the port of Rome. He had a message from an Irish prince or chieftain to his son and daughter, who had been captured by British pirates, and were supposed to have been taken in bondage to Rome.

"When I understood this," said Marius, turning to Baithene and Ethne, "I ventured to question him further, and soon I felt sure that his message was for you, so I took ship with him, and have brought him hither."

Damaris ordered refreshment to be brought, and left the stranger alone with Ethne and Baithene.

When they were alone Dewi knelt again and kissed their hands, and could scarcely be induced to say or do anything but gaze on them rapturously, as on a priceless treasure unexpectedly recovered. But Ethne insisted that the wound on his ankle should be looked to at once, for the blood was flowing fast. Baithene unfastened his sandals. Fortunately the wound, though serious, was not very deep.

"He remembered the place of his old bite," said Dewi, with a grim smile, "and he nearly did it this time."

When the wound was washed and bandaged by Ethne's gentle hands, Dewi was persuaded to sit down and partake of the food provided for him. The questions that could scarcely be asked at first in the tumult of fear and joy and welcome, came out one by one, and brought out the tidings and messages from home. The father and mother were well, Dewi said. But he spoke of them as grey-haired and old, and Baithene and Ethne could only think of them as in the prime and vigour of life. Could it be possible that grief for the loss of their children had thus aged them?

"They welcomed me like a prince, like a brother," Dewi said, "when I told them I came from you—I, who deserved so ill of them! The dog's welcome was what I deserved!" he added in a choking voice.

"You risked your life to serve us and them," said Ethne; "and what welcome could be too warm and thankful for that?"

Dewi acknowledged that he had run many risks, and had many toilsome journeys, but on these he would not dwell. He had seen Patrick also, the great Bishop Patrick. He had received his pardon and his blessing, and he had brought Patrick's blessing for them, their father's and mother's blessing, and Patrick's.

"Did they say what they would have us do?" Baithene asked.

"They long above all to see your faces once more, but they know how perilous the journey is, even if you could be free. And they entreated you for *their* sake, and your own, and your people's, not to come unless it is safe."

“But we are not free!” said Baithene; “do they know that? Do they think any toils or perils could ever have kept us from them if we were free to go?”

Dewi’s eyes sparkled with a consciousness of having good tidings to bring, a remedy, as he thought, for all their woes.

“When you open the packet and empty the bag,” said he, “you will see that you have freedom in your own hands.” And he began to untwist the ropes around the packet, while Baithene opened the bag. In the bag there were coins, gold, silver, and copper; in the packet were costly silks, and store of fine linen and woollen raiment. Finally Dewi drew from another hiding-place a box, which he presented to Ethne; it contained her mother’s jewels, carefully wrought gold and silver torques and bracelets and armlets, with clasps of gems and precious stones.

When Ethne saw the precious things she had clasped around her mother’s neck, and her mother around her own from childhood, she hid her face on her brother’s shoulder and burst into a passion of weeping. When she could speak she turned to Dewi, fearing to seem ungrateful to him.

“You have been all but starved many a time, I know,” she said, “whilst you were keeping sacredly all these treasures to bring to us!”

Then one by one she recognized other humbler ornaments, priceless to her heart from the very smallness of their value, coming as she knew they did from the poverty of those who in giving them had given the best they had.

“This is old Brian’s,” they said, “who died by the pirate’s spear in trying to save us; and this is his mother’s; and this is from our own old nurse, the one precious heirloom of her house.”

“Yes,” replied Dewi; “everything precious your people possessed they insisted on my bringing, till I could carry no more. What were gold and silver to them, they said, when you, the jewels of the hearts of all, were lost?”

A pang shot through Ethne’s heart that they could for a moment have been interested in any one or anything else while these faithful hearts were thus mourning and wearying for them. Something of this she said to Baithene.

“Yet what could we have done?” she added; “how could we live anywhere for anytime without loving?”

“Surely *you* could not, darling,” he replied. “The Heavenly Father made you that way.”

After a time Damaris returned with Fabricius.

“What are all these treasures?” Fabricius asked; and Dewi answered through Baithene—

“These, my lord, are the ransoms sent by the Irish king and his people to the prince and princess, their son and daughter, that they may be restored to their home and their land.”

“I require no ransom,” Fabricius said. “I have always thought of these noble captives as free-born, and high-born as myself;” and going to a chest he drew out a parchment. “This is the deed of manumission,” he said, “setting free according to our law those who have been taken captive. It is merely a form. I only held it back until the moment seemed to have come when it would be safe for them to return to their country.”

Ethne and Baithene were much moved at the generous intentions of the old Roman; but yet Marius felt they were not satisfied, and could not be, to receive their freedom as a gift from any one.

“Father,” he said, “and you our guests of patrician descent, though of another race, pardon me if I misunderstand you and say what you do not like. But it seems to me the ransom of the chieftain and his people should be accepted. It must be sweeter and truer for our guests that they should be delivered from unjust captivity by the willing sacrifices of their own kindred, rather than by any gift from us. I suggest that the ransom be accepted, and these victims of the misrule of the country we Romans have abandoned, should be declared to be what they have always in justice been—free by Divine and human right always and for ever.”

Ethne’s eyes were full of grateful tears as she raised them for a moment and met his. Fabricius demurred a little.

“There must, I fear,” he said, “be a deed of manumission, or something to that effect, to satisfy our law. And how is it possible for me to accept a ransom for doing an act of justice and reparation to foreigners, for wrongs committed by Roman law? to Christians, for wrongs inflicted by apostate Christians?”

“It is best as Marius says,” interposed the soft voice of Damaris decisively.

“Take money for restoring rights to these our friends and honoured guests!” the old man exclaimed indignantly.

“Let it be a gift all round,” Damaris replied; “your gift to Eleazar for them, the generous gift of their kindred for these children to thee and me.”

But after a short consultation in low tones between the brother and sister, Baithene interposed with an objection.

“Should not everything be true between us all, lady?” he said to Damaris. “Let it be simply a debt repaid for the ransom so generously given. Let the illustrious Fabricius graciously receive the sum he most graciously gave for us to the Jew. Thus I think will our parents and our people be content.”

And Ethne added—

“Our people would not take back what they have given. We must not rob them of the joy of their sacrifices, for theirs are all offerings of loyalty and love.”

“Then, that mercy and truth may meet together, fair maiden,” replied Fabricius, “so be it; you shall have your way.”

Accordingly the bagful of Roman coin, received for Irish merchandise, was poured out on the table, and every coin was carefully counted against the ransom paid by Fabricius to Eleazar.

To the satisfaction of Fabricius, there was found to be a considerable amount over. Baithene would have thrown it all in, but Fabricius replied, laughing—

“Nay, my friend, we also can be wilful. Let truth have her rigid rights, as you demand; and besides,” he added, “think of the misery of our friend the Jew in having made such a bad bargain.”

At this Ethne’s colour rose, and with a tearful voice she said—

“Eleazar and Miriam could have made a far higher price to the officers of the Imperial household, but they had pity on us. I shall tell them all at once.”

“And we will give them the rest of the coins,” suggested Baithene.

“We will give them *nothing*,” replied Ethne, decisively. “They had pity on us; and nothing shall rob them of the grace of their compassion, or us of the right to be grateful.”

Thus the friendly contest ended, and the gathering dispersed—Damaris to have the quiet interview she had been longing for with Marius; Fabricius and Lucia to settle Dewi into comfortable quarters; Ethne and Baithene, with the dog, to the house of Eleazar. There they found Miriam, and claimed her sympathy in their good tidings.

“It is surely a good augury for thee,” Ethne said. “I have found my mother! And thou shalt surely yet find thy daughter! The Good Shepherd knows indeed where every one of His flock is; and therefore He will know how to restore your lost lamb to you.” And as she left, she fastened round Miriam’s wrist the most costly and beautiful of the gold bracelets. “Give that to your daughter when you find her,” she said; “it is my mother’s; let me give it from her to thy child.”

Eleazar came in as she spoke. Miriam was softly weeping, and the old man was moved to the heart. As a son of Aaron, he laid his priestly hands in benediction on the heads of the Irish captives.

“May the blessing of the God of our fathers rest on you, my son and daughter,” he said; and then solemnly he pronounced the ancient priestly benediction committed to the sons of Aaron: “The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And pray thou to our God for us,” he afterwards added sadly and humbly to Ethne; “it seems that He hears *thee*.”

When Marius and Damaris were alone together, it was some time before they said anything. They sat hand in hand on the couch, whilst Marius placed his other hand before his eyes. At length she gently withdrew her hand from his, and then withdrawing his from his forehead, took both his hands with a gesture of tender, motherly command into her own, and looked into his eyes.

“It is thou who hast made the real sacrifice to-day,” she said very softly. “Thy lady and princess, being free, will go back as soon as possible, thou well knowest, at any cost or peril, to her father and mother, her country and her people.”

“Would not that be right for her?” he said. “If it is, she is sure to see and do the thing that is right.”

“She *will* think this right,” Damaris replied.

“And what ought *we* to do?” he asked, in an anguish of suspense.

“Pray Leo’s prayer,” she replied, “all of us. Teach us to think and do the things that are rightful.”

“It is an excellent prayer,” said Marius very respectfully, but not, apparently, at all consoled, “and prayer always comforts thee.”

Then the mother threw her arms around her son, and a radiant smile illumined her face as she looked up into his.

“Ethne’s heart will surely turn to thee, my son,” she said. “God has chosen her out of all the world for thee, and led her to thee, as He led Eve to Adam. Trust Him, and trust her.”

“Mother,” he said, “may I say anything to her?”

“You may say what you will,” she replied, “or what you can, whatever thy heart feels free to say, and she is willing to hear. Thou art free, and she is free. Let her choose what she will, and in her own time.”

“But my father?” he asked.

“Leave him to me,” smiled Damaris. “We have understood each other long enough.”

Marius had not long to wait. Soon after, Lucia joined them, and they waited in the porch for the return of Ethne and Baithene. It was evening before they came back, with a happy repose in their look and manner. This newly acknowledged freedom seemed to make little difference to Ethne; but Baithene’s step was light with a new spring, and his whole being had a new power, not so much as if he had been ransomed from bondage, but as if he had sprung at a bound into full and princely manhood, prepared to take his place in the world.

Fabricius drew near and greeted him with a smile.

“You have been to your friends the Israelites. Doubtless,” he added with some malice to Ethne, “you, lady, have kept your rigid determination to bestow nothing on them.”

“She has given Miriam the treasure she values most—an ancient heirloom of our house,” replied Baithene.

Ethne could not defend herself; and Lucia kissed her hand, laughing, and said—

“Of course; I knew—we all knew what thou wouldst do!”

Had Lucia spoken thus but yesterday, Baithene would have retorted with a jest; but with the recognition of their freedom and true place in the world, and all the happy possibilities the breaking down of any barrier between them might involve, had come also an indefinable distance between them, and he only said—

“I had thought that very jewel might be accepted by thy mother or by thee, little as our poor barbarian treasures must seem to you.”

Damaris expressed a wish to see the Irish treasures again, and whilst the others went into an inner chamber to look at them, Marius remained alone with Ethne in the portico, the soft perfume of lilies and roses coming to them from the gardens. Whilst he was hesitating what to say, she began—

“Tell me,” she said, “about Lupus, the good old Bishop of Troyes. Is he back in his own city again?”

Marius hesitated a moment, and then he replied—

“Thy judgment of Attila was just: he did not fail. Bishop Lupus came back unharmed. But his own people failed, incredible as it seems. His own

flock, the city he had saved at risk of his life, when he returned from his perilous sojourn among the Huns, received him coldly, indeed would scarcely receive him at all. Mean slanderers had been there poisoning the minds of the citizens during his absence. They said he must have treacherously flattered and fawned upon the barbarians, and be in league with Attila; and they gave him but a cold welcome."

"What did the Bishop do?" she asked indignantly.

"He quietly retired to a mountain not far off," Marius replied, "and there to this day he is living in exile, poor and solitary and neglected."

"Yet surely praying and hoping still for his misguided flock!" Ethne said; and with her victorious smile she added, "He is sure to win in the end. But why, oh, why is it we, we Christ's Christians, seem so often most to fail Him and His?"

"*All* do not fail," he said, seeking to comfort her. "My friend Sidonius Apollinaris writes to Bishop Lupus as 'father of fathers, as old well-nigh as Moses, but also as great.'"

"But ah," she said mournfully, "what a world this might be if only all the Church were *one*, and true!"

"You are weary," he said sadly, "of this decrepit, decaying old world of ours. You are longing to go home to your own young world of hope—to your Patrick, and your own people, who understand and honour their saint so well!"

"When we may," she said. "I am the only daughter of my house, and my father and mother are aged."

"I know well what that means," he replied. "We also are only children of our house. Dost thou not know, lady, that always, with all my power, at any cost to myself, I would fain help thee to what thou deemest best?"

"You have always helped us," she said, "always understood—at Orleans, at Troyes—always."

"If you decide on leaving Rome," he said, after a pause, in a low, deep voice, "I would try and help you at any cost."

Did she understand, he wondered, at what a cost it might be to himself? Did either of them understand what a pang of conflict it might cost to her? Her eyelids fell before his passionate gaze, the dark lashes shaded her cheek. But at that moment he felt he would not, need not question her further. A trembling hope came into his heart that he had won his answer; and with the hope came the response to his mother's words about Leo's prayer, and he said softly—

"Help us to think and to do the things that are rightful."

Then the frank, grey eyes were raised once more to his with an expression of rejoicing and entire trust.

"What is *rightful*?" she said. "That must always mean what He Who loves us best sees is best for us, must it not?"

And for the first time he seemed to see into the clear depths of her soul, and to be sure that she was no longer apart from him to be questioned, but close beside him, sharing his very soul, and questioning herself. He felt as if the pleading for him with her was in higher hands, and quite safe there. And suddenly he felt constrained to open the depths of his own heart and mind to her.

"Leo and his prayers are so much to my mother and to you," he said. "Can you bear all these debates and controversies about the deepest things of all? They seem to me like troops of Huns wheeling around within the very Holy of Holies. They make everything like a mere word-battle and empty show to me. Or they *did* make it so till lately," he added, glancing at her with a new light in his eyes.

"I don't know all the mistaken things other people have been thinking," she answered quietly, "but to me Bishop Leo always seems simply unfolding into full, beautiful blossom the faith Patrick taught us in the Creed and the Hymn. He always seems building a fortress and stronghold for us all. But the fortress is for us also a home; for we are children, *inside*. He makes me think often of the words they chant in church: 'The Lord is my Rock and my Fortress,' the sweet voices say; and the others answer, 'He shall defend thee under His wings, and thou shalt be safe under His feathers.' Stone buttresses of a fortress to the enemy outside; to those within, a warm nest with the soft feathers and downy breast of a mother-bird brooding over us. For the stronghold is not anything Bishop Leo builds, but God Himself, to Whom he leads us, and God is love."

"And you yourself have led me within, and we are together."

"We *are* together," said Ethne.

And that evening they said no more.

The days sped quickly away in the palace on the Aventine. Dewi's wound was rather slow in healing; and until their faithful messenger could return, there was a suspense as to the possibility of decisions for the future.

Day by day as it passed drew the little company closer to each other.

In those days it was an unquestioned right and duty of parents to dispose of their sons and daughters in marriage. It was a responsibility and a power not to be set aside.

"There must be two marriages," Fabricius said decisively to Damaris. "These four are clearly made for each other."

"Dost thou see what that would mean for us?" she replied.

"Thou wouldst gain a daughter-in-law after thine heart," he said.

"But our own Lucia!" she sighed.

"Lucia," he answered, "would win a husband worthy of her. Where in this corrupt city could we find a son-in-law so good and true, such a man, such a Roman, as Baithene? A new life and order come into the farm, the forest, the household, wherever he is."

"But Baithene will not be for *our* household," she said, with some hesitation, fearing he had not counted the cost.

"I know that too well," he said. "Our Luciola will be for his home, his kingdom, his people. But is that a new lot for our race? Is it not our ancient destiny and calling to send forth men and women trained to bring light and order everywhere throughout the world? I am old, beloved, and cannot long be here to care for her or thee in these evil times. Thou art younger, at least always young to me. Canst *thou* be content to give the child to Baithene?"

“We are Christians, my beloved!” she replied, “and, in the old time-honoured words, ‘to us all countries are a fatherland.’ We have given the children to the Lord Christ from the first; and if He calls them to the ends of the earth they must go. All lands are His; this land of theirs seems even now to be beginning to listen to His call, and to need them more than any.”

Thus in simple patriarchal or Roman fashion it happened, that by the paternal power the union already in the hearts of their children was sanctioned and brought into the region of acknowledged fact. Fabricius decreed that there should be two betrothals. Baithene had no question that his father and mother would welcome as a priceless treasure such a bride. But Ethne stipulated that before a marriage could be, they must receive the consent and benediction of their own father and mother. To procure this was no easy matter, with the broken communication brought about by the decay of the Empire, the breaking up of the grand old system of Roman roads, and the interposing of nations of unsettled invaders throughout Gaul and Britain.

But before their plans could be matured a new peril burst in on the harmony of the peaceful home on the Aventine from the chaotic world outside. It was reported that Attila was once more on the march to ravage Italy and capture Rome.

CHAPTER XVI.
BELEAGUERED AQUILEIA.

ttila the Hun had been nursing his vengeance and preparing his forces beyond the Danube all through that silent winter which had brought such peace and light to the palace on the Aventine. And early in the spring came the terrible tidings that he was coming with his hundreds of thousands, always, it seemed, to be renewed from the inexhaustible regions of barbarian life in the wilds of the East; and this time he was to be turned back by no diplomacy, nor turned aside by any intervening prey. Attila and his Huns were already at the frontier, besieging the great frontier fortress of Aquileia, on their way to capture and plunder Rome.

There was little time for consideration. It was no moment, they all felt, for a woman to venture into the perils of a journey across Europe. It was therefore decided that Baithene should go back with Dewi to Ireland. It was also a time, Marius felt, for every Roman who was able to devote himself to the defence of the Empire against a force whose triumph would mean the destruction of Christianity and civilization, the laying waste of all Europe into a Tartar wilderness, creation lapsing again into chaos.

And so the four, so recently drawn together, had to part. But the parting brought in some ways a new certainty of their inseparable union, like the ripening of a “sudden frost.”

Baithene said to Lucia—

“I am going to my Ireland, with no doubt in my heart as to the welcome my father and mother would have for thee. Only for thee, sometimes I scarcely dare to ask that thou shouldst come forth to share our rough life, to be exiled from such a home as thine.”

“My father,” was Lucia’s answer, “thinks of that island of thine as a haven of peace and simplicity, and my mother as an isle of saints, compared with our Rome.”

“But thou thyself?”

“I am not sure of any country being a haven, or a heaven,” she said. “Perhaps,” she added with a smile, “neither thou nor I may be ready for either yet. I may have to grow younger, and thou older. But we should be *together*, in the storm or in the calm. And I am well content.”

And Marius said to Ethne—

“How can I leave thee, who hast made earth dear to me and heaven real? who hast given me back faith in God and hope in man?”

“Thou art not leaving me,” Ethne replied. “We are in one path, in the steps of the pitiful, redeeming Lord. Thou wilt not despair of the slaves, however degraded, or of the Huns, however savage, for His sake.”

“For His sake and thine,” he replied, “for the sacred memory of thy captivity, and the dear first vision of thee beside the poor dying boy. Thou feelest then, beloved, that we are beginning our life together now?”

“Have we not begun?” she said. “Our paths may be divided for a little while, but *we* never.”

And so they parted.

For three long months, throughout the spring, the tidings of the ruin and ravage of the Huns on the northern shores of the Adriatic continued to reach the household on the Aventine. The great hordes were still swarming in the neighbourhood of unconquered Aquileia, whither they knew Marius had gone, and where the Roman garrison were making a stand worthy of old Rome.

One letter reached the mother from her son—

“I am once more in the house of the lady Digna, the young matron who, in her beauty and truth, seems to belong rather to the grand simplicity of the Republic than to any people or any period since. Close to her house is a high tower rising above the river, flowing crystal clear as if fresh from the blue hills which you see from the top. We cannot despair of saving the city, the virgin city, that has kept off so many enemies. The traditions of the ancient heroism seem to inspire its men and its women to-day. There are stories of days not so long gone, when the Emperor Julian floated wooden towers on rafts up the river to penetrate into the place where it had no walls. But the citizens set fire to the towers and baffled the Emperor. Impregnable this city of the north wind has been, as the north wind himself in the fastnesses of those rugged mountains. If we can but keep her impregnable this once more, who knows but the hordes of Attila may turn back again from Italy, as they did from Gaul after our battle on the plains of Châlons? There are rumours of discouragement and division in Attila’s camp. The ancient spell of Rome, some say, is falling on them, the memory of Alaric lying dead beneath the river-bed so soon after that last siege and sack; it is said even to have in some measure benumbed Attila himself. Glorious it would be if this old stronghold should by her heroic stand keep back the tide of devastation from our Italy, perchance even drive back for ever the flood of barbarism from the world; and Jerome’s birthplace become the birthplace of a new order and freedom for all Christendom, a new Vulgate or translation of the great old Scriptures of righteousness and peace into the common tongue of men.

“The trade has indeed for the moment vanished from her port; the fleets of her merchantmen behold her from afar off; the sea is silent, and the busy fields around are dumb and waste. But if this unusual quiet in the camp of Attila does indeed mean that discouragement has fallen on his hosts, this silence may prove the silence of dawn. But whatever the end, the many heroic deeds done here can never be lost.”

After that letter, week after week flowed on, but brought no tidings from Marius. They heard indeed from time to time that Aquileia still held her own, that the great hordes still surrounded the city, apparently checked and baffled there, unable to press on to further destruction while that brave garrison remained unconquered in their rear.

From Baithene no one expected tidings until he brought them himself.

And so the four on the Aventine were drawn closer to each other, through their common suspense, their common love, their common prayers. Happily for them the natural spring was also the Christian Lent, with its prayers and fasts, to be followed by the Passion-tide, and the solemn, immortal joys of Easter which no sorrow ever more could quench.

And through all they had the great sermons of Leo, strong against all despondency, firm against all yielding to the enemy as Aquileia herself, with the bracing force as of the north wind through them. Their Roman reticence and brevity made them a rock of strength amidst the floods of dread and suspense surging through every heart; they seemed not so much words as the sympathetic sustaining grasp of a strong hand. And from Damaris Ethne learned how those powerful words were the tried weapons of a warrior who had proved them on many battle-fields with many foes, of a commander who by them had many a time rallied the wavering forces of the Church. On two great campaigns Damaris dwelt, especially the first—the warfare which had ended in the victory of Chalcedon. Damaris told the story how the great letter of Leo, called the "Tome," was planted as a battering-ram against the heresies of the Latrocinium, the "robber-council" of Ephesus; the letter addressed to the Council through the good Bishop Flavian of Constantinople, which he was never suffered to read, the letter being drowned in the furious cries of the heretics, who with fierce blows and buffetings actually did Bishop Flavian himself to death. But that defeat, she said, had been repaired by the victory of the ancient Catholic faith at Chalcedon, on the Asiatic shore opposite Constantinople. The great Council assembled there enthusiastically welcomed Leo's letter, and cried with one voice—"This we all believe! Peter has spoken by Leo! This is the true faith! This is the faith of the Fathers." And with the story of that battle was linked a touch of tender feeling, the only record left of Leo's having shed tears. The Empress Placidia wrote from Rome to her niece the Empress Pulcheria at Constantinople, that when Leo was imploring her to bring about the assembling of the great Council of Chalcedon to reverse the fatal decision of Ephesus, so full was his heart of the truth he was defending, that "he could scarcely speak for tears."

The second campaign of which Damaris told the story was that with the Manicheans, in their two divisions of false asceticism and false freedom. These battles he fought in Rome, upholding against the ascetics, who crept about with sad countenances and sordid garments, the truth that "every creature of God is good, and to be enjoyed with thanksgiving;" on the other hand, contending against the licentious, who, declaring the body to be essentially evil, regarded whatever evil was done by it as indifferent, and thus fell into frightful depths of cruelty and impurity, and repressing them with resolute severity, or driving them from the city they polluted, as those smitten with a malignant or infectious disease.

It was with no shadows that Leo fought, but for the foundations of Christian faith and human morality; to preserve for the Church her Divine and human Christ, His Divine omnipotent love, His suffering human sympathy; to preserve for the world the sacredness of family life, the pure love of husband and wife, of father, mother, and child, the Divine creation of the body as well as the soul. For in those days paganism was scarcely dead, or, at all events, scarcely crumbled into harmless dust, with powerless poetic shades, noiselessly gliding around their former haunts; but still retaining in death a deadly malaria of corruption and disease.

Leo's fervent words Ethne found, more and more, were no mere holiday strains of soothing or exciting music, but a clarion call making no uncertain sound, summoning for the perpetual battle with sloth and selfishness, with the paralysis of hopelessness or of lazy content, with sin and wrong within and without.

In the sonorous, sententious Latin, Leo's strong words rang out, in the grand language of law and war which held its own so long in the Church, which at that time had been softened into none of its daughter-tongues, but stood, amidst the countless, shifting dialects of the barbarians, the one great language of law and literature, and of the Christian worship of the West. Leo himself knew no other; of Greek he was ignorant, or, at least, did not speak or write it. His letters had to be translated for the Eastern Church.

From Damaris Ethne began indeed to learn something of her native Greek, but as yet only as a beautiful foreign language. Latin was becoming to her familiar as a mother-tongue, and she listened enrapt as Leo spoke in the great basilicas words such as these: "Templum Dei sumus, si Spiritus Dei habitat in nobis. Plus est quod fidelis suo habet animo quam quod miratur cœlo"—words which gained a double significance and force, because, like so many of Leo's utterances, they were watchwords, they were weapons used against a lingering paganism which made many turn in idolatrous worship towards the sun, on the very steps of the Christian basilica.

And again—"Oh, man, recognize the dignity of thy nature! Remember that thou art made in the image of God; once corrupted in Adam, now moulded anew in Christ."

She listened with eager delight to Leo's "seven steps" of the Beatitudes: the first, Poverty of Spirit. "He commends the humility of souls, rather than the indigency of faculties." Humility, he admitted, might be easier for the poor than for the rich, "nevertheless," he said, "in many of the rich a mind is found which uses riches not to swell the tumour of pride, but to do works of loving-kindness, that is, counts it the greatest gain to relieve the miseries of others."

Again, of another of those "steps" of the Beatitudes, of the "hungering and thirsting after righteousness," Leo said, "It is with God Himself man would be filled." To love righteousness is nothing else than to love God. "Nihil aliud est diligere justitiam quam amare Deum." And when he reached the last of those seven upward steps, fervently he spoke of the purity of heart which cleanses the mirror (of the heart) to see and to reflect God, "whose reward is to see Him not in a mirror darkly, but face to face." The fine balance of his words throbbed on the heart like the vibrations of a church bell.

"In Christ," he proclaimed, "we are all one. All the regenerate in Christ the sign of the Cross constitutes kings, the unction of the Holy Spirit consecrates priests, in order that, besides that special service of our ministry, all the whole body of spiritual and rational Christians should recognize themselves to be partakers of royal race, and of sacerdotal office. For what is so royal as a soul subject to God and ruler of the body? And what is so sacerdotal as to dedicate to God a pure conscience, and the sacrifices (*hostias*) of a spotless piety from the altar of the heart?"

CHAPTER XVII.
A RETREAT WITH ST. LEO THROUGH LENT AND EASTER.

pring, with its wealth of beauty on the earth, and its Lenten discipline in the Church, was slowly passing away in Rome; and all the time Aquileia was holding out through the three months' agony of her siege, a perpetual reminder and symbol to the household on the Aventine of the spiritual conflict to be waged always by all. For Marius, their own Marius, was there, in what might prove the last death-struggle of civilization and Christianity, or might prove the travail-pangs of the birth of a new world of life and light. And now the fast of Lent was deepening into the shadows of Gethsemane, and the Passion-tide was bringing the pathos and strength of the Cross; and again the voice of Bishop Leo rang through the basilicas with its deep, inspiring tones.

"So it is, dearly beloved, that the true ground of Christian hope is the Cross of Christ. Whilst the blindness of the Jew does not see what isDivine in Christ Jesus, and the wisdom of the Gentiles despises what is human; whilst the former speak deprecatingly of the Lord's glory, and the latter assume airs of pride about His lowliness, we adore the Son of God equally in His own might and in our infirmity."

As Ethne listened, to her, Jew and Gentile were no lifeless, technical expressions; her heart went up to God for Miriam and Eleazar, that they might look up, and looking, be no longer blind, but see the love which is the glory of God. Again, in Leo's words, she prayed "for that nation by whom the Lord had been crucified, and desired that mercy might be obtained by that people, on account of whose stumbling we have received the grace of reconciliation."

Of the conflict in Gethsemane Leo said—"The lower will gave way to the higher, and it was shown to us what may be prayed for by one in distress, and what ought not be granted by the Healer. For since we know not what to pray for as we ought, and it is good for us that what we wish should not for the most part take place, when we seek for what would hurt us, our good and righteous Lord is merciful in refusing it. Therefore, when our Lord had by threefold prayer settled the mode of putting our own wills right, He said to His disciples, 'Sleep on now and take your rest.'"

And the three women—mother, sister, and bride—in the agony of their Gethsemane of dread and longing for their beloved, at Aquileia or in all the perils of their journeys by sea and land, listening to those words of pardon and peace, comforted one another, and went home that night, and prayed Thy will be done, and slept and took their rest.

Even for Judas Leo had a word of sympathy, recognizing the yearning of the Master even for the traitor.

"From this man," he said, "was withheld no condescension, lest some vexation should give him the motive for crime; for after the Lord had died for all, perhaps even this man might have found mercy if he had not hurried to his death."

And so the tide of tender, sacred adoration flowed deeper and higher on through the days of the Passion, without a touch of morbid, melodramatic sensation, or of weak introspection. "The Festival of our Lord's Passion," as he called it, "suffers us not to be silent amid our exulting bursts of spiritual joy. For since the prophet says, 'Seek His face evermore,' no one ought to presume that he has found the whole of what he is seeking, lest by seeking to advance we fail to draw near."

"The lowliness we see in God amazes us more than the power; we find it harder to grasp the emptying of the Divine Majesty than the carrying up on high the form of a servant.

"He shed righteous blood which was to be both the ransom and the cup of life (*pretium et poculum*) for the reconciliation of the world. Not a reluctant victim, but a willing sacrifice. For the nature which in us was ever guilty, in Him suffered, innocent and free.

"What is inflicted by ferocity is welcomed by free-will, so that the audacity of the crime completes the work of the Eternal will.

"He submitted Himself to the impious hands of infuriated men, who were busy with their own wickedness, and were doing the behests of the Redeemer. Even towards those who were killing Him, so strong was His feeling of tenderness, that in His prayer to the Father from the Cross, He asked not that He should be avenged, but that they should be pardoned.

"The might of that prayer, 'Father, forgive them,' had this result, that the hearts of many who said, 'Let His blood be on us and our children,' were converted by the preaching of Peter the Apostle, and in one day three thousand were baptized; and they all became of one heart and of one soul, and ready to die for Him Whose Crucifixion they had demanded.

"He was not only wont to heal bodily infirmities, but the wounds of sickly souls, saying to the paralytic, 'Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee.'

"For He, without any infirmities of sin, took on Him all the infirmities that come from sin; so that he lacked not the sensations of hunger and thirst, of sleep and weariness, of sorrow and weeping, and endured the cruelest pains, even to the extremity of death. For no one could be loosed from the entangling nets of mortality, unless He in Whom the nature of man was innocent allowed Himself to be put to death by the hands of the ungodly."

And again, lest that sacred season should become the mere commemoration of the dead, and not the communion of the living, Leo said—"We ought to honour the Lord's Passover as present, rather than remember the Passover as passed."

Again—"He it is Who, making no exception of any nation, forms out of every nation under heaven one flock of holy sheep, and is daily performing what He has promised in the words, 'And other sheep I have which are not of this fold, them also I must bring; and they shall hear My voice, and they shall be one flock and one Shepherd.'

"For although it is to blessed Peter in the first instance that He says, 'Feed My sheep,' yet the care of all the sheep actually belonging to all the shepherds is under the direction of the one Lord; and those who are on the rock He nourishes in such pleasant, well-watered pastures, that numberless sheep, strengthened with the fulness of love, hesitate not themselves to die for the name of the Shepherd, even as the Good Shepherd Himself was pleased to lay down His life for the sheep. He it is in Whom not only the glorious courage of martyrs has a share, but also the faith of all

who are new-born.

"The fiery sword by which the Land of Life was shut in has been quenched by the sacred blood of Christ.

"Before the true Light the gloom of the old night has given way. The Christian people are invited to the riches of Paradise; and to all the regenerate has been laid open a path of return to the lost Fatherland, if only no one causes that way to be closed against himself, which could be opened to the faith of the robber."

Ethne's thoughts went back to Dewi the pirate.

So the forty days of the fast and the week of the Passion passed on, and the lives of Christians were gathered into the life and death of Christ; until at the close the grave voice of Leo, as a faithful leader of souls, led the people from the contemplation of the Sufferer into the fellowship of His sufferings.

"If it was a grievous offence to neglect the Paschal Festival, it is more dangerous to take our place in Church assemblies whilst we are not gathered into the fellowship of our Lord's Passion. For who does really honour Christ as having suffered, died, and been raised again, save he who also suffers, dies, and rises again with Christ? These events are carried on in the children of the Church. The warfare is perpetual, the enemy malignant and strong as ever. Here then, at the Cross, let the Christian station himself, where Christ lifted him up with Himself; and to that point let him direct all his life, where he knows human nature was saved. For the Passion of our Lord is prolonged even to the end of the world; and as in His saints He is honoured and loved, and as in the poor He is fed and clothed, so in all who suffer for righteousness' sake He suffers too. Unless, indeed, we are to think that since faith has been multiplied all over the world, all the persecutions and all the conflicts which raged against the blessed martyrs have come to an end; as though the necessity of taking up the Cross had been incumbent only on them. But very different is the experience of pious men who are serving God, and very different the witness of the Apostle. 'All who resolve to live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.' By which sentence he is proved to be sadly lukewarm and indolent who is attacked by no persecution. For none but those who love the world can be at peace with it; and there is 'no fellowship at any time between iniquity and righteousness,' no concord between falsehood and truth, no agreement of darkness with light. It is safer for man to have earned the devil's enmity than his friendship; therefore the wise souls who have learned to fear and love our Lord do not stoop either to dread their foes or to do them homage. For they prefer God's will, ever, to themselves, and love themselves all the better, inasmuch as for the love of God they love themselves not.

"For in those who, after the Apostle's example, chastise the body and bring it into servitude, the same enemies are being despised by the same courage, and even now the world is being overcome by Christ."

At length the light of Easter Day broke in on Christian Rome, the first Easter Ethne had ever spent in a city, had ever spent in Christendom. The joy of the festival swept her away in its great tide, the bells pealing from every basilica, the stately Ambrosian hymns filling the churches, the streets, and the homes with their grave and exulting music. The morning broke with the "*Aurora lucis rutilat*," and the "*Hic est dies verus Dei*." The voices of priests and people, in what was then the vulgar tongue of all, rose high in the "Ad cœnam Agni Providi."

"The Supper of the Lamb to share,
We come in raiment white and
fair."

And still through all, penetrating and rising above all the tides of sound, sounded the deep voice of Leo. Through the Passion-tide he had been preaching to them the duty of the taking up the Cross of Christ, that their actual life might enshrine within it the Paschal solemnity. "If then, dearly beloved," he said, "we believe in our hearts what we profess, we also have been raised the third day, for 'ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.' Let the people of God acknowledge themselves to be a new creation in Christ Jesus, and, with souls on the watch, understand Him by Whom they have been apprehended, and Whom they may apprehend.

"Let not the things that have been made new return to the old state which abideth not; and let not him who put his hand to the plough give up his work, but fix his attention on what he is sowing, not looking back to what he has left."

Again—"Though the rolling away of the stone, the emptying of the sepulchre, the laying aside the linen, the shining of the angels, did abundantly establish the reality of our Lord's Resurrection, yet He mercifully appeared to the women; He suffered Himself to be handled with careful and inquisitive touch by those of whom doubt was taking hold."

Thus the faithful voice led the people on through Easter to the Ascension. Very quiet were the words, not exhausting the joy in a burst of rapture, but leading it onward and upward in an ever-rising tide of certainty and victory "too deep for sound or foam"; very quiet, quiet and strong as the first flood-tide of the first joy of the first Easter.

Nor did he forget the doubt, the heavy weight of apprehension, the slow reviving to faith of the hearts of the disciples benumbed by sorrow; the magnitude of the weight which gives the true measure of the power which lifted it.

"For the death of Christ," he said, "had sorely disturbed the hearts of the disciples, and a kind of torpor of distrust had slowly crept into minds oppressed by sorrow, on account of the humiliation of the Cross, the yielding up of the spirit, the burial of the lifeless body.

"For when the holy women in the gospel history had announced to the disciples that the stone was rolled away from the tomb, that the body was not in the sepulchre, and that angels bore witness that the Lord was alive, their words seemed to the apostles and disciples as idle tales; and surely this uncertainty would in nowise be allowed by the Spirit of Truth to exist in the hearts of his preachers, unless their trembling anxiety and inquiring hesitation had laid the foundation of our faith. It was for our perturbations and our dangers that provision was being made in the case of the apostles; we, in them, were being instructed against the calumnies of the impious, and against the triumphs of the world's wisdom; we have been taught by their seeing, we have heard by their hearing. Let us give thanks to the Divine Providence, and to that necessary tardiness of our holy fathers. Doubts were felt by them, that no doubts might be felt by us.

"Those days, dearly beloved, between the Resurrection and the Ascension did not pass away in an inactive course; but in them great and sacred truths were confirmed, great mysteries were revealed. To the Magdalene He said, 'Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to My Father;' that is, 'I will not have thee come to Me corporeally, to recognize Me by the sensations of the flesh; I am putting thee off to something loftier, I am preparing thee for something greater. When I shall have ascended to My Father, then thou shalt handle Me more perfectly and more truly, being about to apprehend what thou touchest not, and to believe what thou seest not.' When He took Himself away to the majesty of the Father, He began in an

ineffable manner to be more present in His Divinity. And a truly great and unspeakable cause of rejoicing it was, when, in the presence of that holy multitude, the nature of manhood was ascending above the dignity of all celestial creatures, to pass above the angelic ranks, and to be elevated above the high seats of the archangels; and not to let any degree of loftiness be a limit to its advancement, until it should be received to sit down with the Eternal Father, and associated in the throne with His glory, to Whose nature it is united in the Son. Since then Christ's Ascension is our advancement, and whither the glory of the Head is gone before, thither is it the hope of the body to be summoned, let us, dearly beloved, exult with befitting joys and devout thanksgiving. For to-day have we not only been confirmed in the possession of Paradise, but in Christ we have penetrated to the heights of Heaven, having won through the unspeakable grace of Christ nobler gifts than we had lost through the wiles of the devil.

"This faith, increased by our Lord's Ascension, and strengthened by the gift of the Holy Spirit, has not been overcome by chains, nor imprisonments, nor banishments, nor famine, nor the sword, nor the teeth of wild beasts, nor by any torments invented by the cruelty of persecutors. For this faith, throughout the whole world, not only men but even women, not only young boys but tender maidens, contended to the shedding of their own blood; whatever had before caused them fear now turned into joy.

"Let us therefore, dearly beloved, follow after charity, without which no one can shine; that through this way of love whereby Christ descended to us, we also may be able to ascend to Him, to Whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost belong honour and glory for ever."

So the tide of Christian joy flowed on fuller and fuller to Whitsuntide, when the great company of the newly baptized gathered around the fonts in their white robes, as at Easter. Then Ethne's heart went back to that glad white-robed company of neophytes which had gathered around the well, beside the little chapel of rough-hewn stones in her own island. It was but a year since she had sat with her brother in the white robes of baptism on the cliff by her father's house. And in looking back from the pomp of these great assemblies in the stately basilicas on that homely gathering, she felt more than ever how glorious had been that simple beginning of new life in the new world, as at the first Pentecost. "From Him, the Holy Spirit," Bishop Leo said, "comes the thirst; from Him, the calling on the Father; from Him, the groans of suppliants. As in that first exultant choir of all human tongues, the majesty of the Holy Ghost was present, let the minds of the faithful rejoice, because now through all the world our God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is praised by the acknowledgment rendered in every tongue, and because that indication which was given in the form of fire is still witnessed, alike as a work and a gift. For the Spirit of Truth Himself makes the house of His glory shine with the radiance of His own light, and wills not to have in His temple anything dark or lukewarm."

"The house of His glory also," Ethne murmured to Damaris, "was that little round stone cell of Patrick's building in our Ireland."

"The house of His glory is Patrick's heart and Leo's, and, in their humble place, thine and mine," Damaris said. "Did not our Leo say,*Templum Dei sumus, si Spiritus Dei habitat in nobis*? Greater is what the faithful Christian has in his heart than what he wonders at in the heavens."

CHAPTER XVIII.
THE FALL OF AQUILEIA.

hus the great festivals of the Church swept on, and spring had conquered winter in the natural and the Christian year.

All through those months the household on the Aventine knew that Aquileia was still holding her own, and trusted that there also the summer was beating back the winter.

Ethne remembered Orleans, with her brave garrison, and her brave aged Bishop Anianus and his victorious prayers; and Lupus with his peaceful victory over Attila at Troyes; and her hope was strong that victory must come for Aquileia also, through Aquileia for the Roman world.

Moreover, one more little volume of waxen tablets reached them from Marius, still within the unconquered city.

"We are holding our own," he wrote; "the walls still stand unshattered, the heart of the enemy, they say, is failing, the besiegers seem to slacken at their work. Glorious it will be if this great host is driven back, baffled by one faithful stronghold. Despair not for us; hope and pray!"

But they had scarcely read these words of courage and hope, when another message brought the fatal tidings that Aquileia, the impregnable, had fallen, was being razed to the ground and burnt to ashes, and, with the terrible Hunnish genius of destruction, smitten to the dust never to rise any more.

A flight of storks had done it; a flock of harmless, innocent birds had accomplished the ruin of Aquileia.

Just as the assailants were wearying of their work, and murmurs of retreat were spreading in the camp, and Attila himself was pacing round the unbroken walls, moodily meditating whether to go or stay, the flapping of wings and the cry of birds arrested his attention. He looked up, and saw the white storks which had built their nests on the roofs of the city soaring high in the air, and alluring their callow young to follow them, evidently with the intention of abandoning the beleaguered city, and, contrary to their usual habits, betaking themselves to the open country. He caught at the augury. "Look there!" he cried to the dispirited soldiers; "see those birds, whose instinct tells them of the future; they are leaving the city which they foresee is to perish, the fortress which they know will fall."

The courage of the Huns revived at his words. Once more they pushed their engines up to the walls, and plied their slings and catapults; and the walls yielded; and Aquileia, the impregnable, the city of the north wind, fell, as was the fate of cities that sank beneath the Huns, never to rise again.

There was need indeed now of Leo's strong words in the sorrowful little family on the Aventine. The fellowship of the Passion was theirs; the cup of the martyrs was held to their lips. But it was Christ, the ever-living, the ever-loving, the all-conquering, not himself, that Leo had set before them; and He, "the Ransom from death, and the Cup of Life" (*pretium et poculum*), would not fail His Christians. All else in the world—emperors, armies, generals, statesmen—were failing Rome. Would Leo himself fail?

Leo did not fail!

The people of Rome had done well in electing him during his absence, and waiting the forty days for his return. Every one else among their rulers failed them, but not Leo.

The feeble Valentinian was present in the city; he had fled to Rome, it was said, as a safer refuge, for the moment, than his Imperial Ravenna, enclosed in her marshes. The port of Ravenna on the Adriatic was too near the fallen city of Aquileia, so long the queen of the Adriatic; too near the hordes of the Huns. Aetius, the great general, the Count of Italy, seemed to fail them. The foremost place which he obtained for himself by basely betraying his great rival Boniface, Count of Africa, had proved no post of ease or real power to him. The feeble Emperor himself had become his rival, using him (as was afterwards terribly proved) not a moment longer than the hour of danger lasted. Boniface was dead; Africa, through his treachery, was lost to the Empire, to civilization, and, as it was proved afterwards, to Christianity; and Italy lay bare to the foe. He himself had become the dread and detestation of the weak and wicked court, and now it seemed as if a palsy had fallen on his own strong will and clear intellect; it was rumoured that Aetius was counselling the Emperor that they should take flight together and abandon Rome to her fate.

Only Leo was left. But Leo stood firm, a rock of strength because he stood on the Rock. Still his protecting presence and his words of power were there—"Christ Himself has not abandoned the care of His beloved flock."

"Throughout the universal Church Peter is still saying day by day, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God;' and every tongue which confesses the Lord is clothed with the majesty of this voice. This faith overcomes the devil and dissolves the fetters of his captives; those who are torn away from the world it engrafts into heaven, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it."

And from day to day, in those days of earthquakes and storms, went up the prayer for ever associated with Leo's name and with this great conflict—

"Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance, that Thy Church may serve Thee in all godly quietness, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Never could the world have seemed less peaceably ordered than then; yet it was indeed not under the governance of Valentinian, or of Aetius, or of Peter, but of God. Never could there have been less external quiet; but the Church, and Leo, kept the "godly quietness" within, in the presence of God. Never could the waves have seemed more likely to overwhelm the Rock than then; but it stood firm as ever. "Our fathers all ate the same spiritual meat, and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ."

And again from every basilica and every house rose Leo's prayer—"Grant us the spirit to think and do always such things as be rightful, that we who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy Will." Leo's prayers were indeed fulfilled for him in the way his inmost soul desired. Of Leo personally scarcely a trace is left, as to the persons he loved, the life he lived, the death he died; his only

monument, the rescue of his Rome, and the Rock of the great Apostle's great confession of the Christ, on which he stood, and which he held for the Church.

Sorely indeed were the strong words of consolation needed in the household on the Aventine. No further sound reached them from Aquileia, no record of individual heroism or deliverance. What voice indeed could come from ashes and a charnel-house?

The fame of only one act seemed borne above that raging storm of murder and rapine; only one name was borne to them through the death-silence that succeeded. It was reported that the good and beautiful young matron Digna, the friend of their house and of Marius, had covered her head like a Roman matron of old, and from the tower on the walls adjoining her house had plunged into the glassy waters of the Natiso which flowed deep and strong below, to escape the insults of the Huns.

When these tidings reached them, for the first time Damaris uttered a cry of despair. "Alas! alas!" she said, "too surely our Marius is slain, or he would have saved her."

But Fabricius shook his head.

"Fond mother's thought! Against such a flood of furious savagery Marius would have been as powerless as when he lay a babe in thine arms;" and then, with a flash of the old patrician fire, he added, "It is not Digna only, it is our old Rome, who chose death rather than dishonour at Aquileia; our Rome has fallen, she is dead, but never could she have perished save by suicide. Our vices have killed us. Yet she has fallen fighting to the last, not as a slave and captive, but as free and the mother of the free. The brave garrison of Aquileia could not save our Rome from ruin, but they have saved it from the worst dishonour; Digna stands for ever as a symbol of her great old glory. And Marius, thank God, our Marius was there!"

But with those words the old man broke down; and the father and mother wept together.

CHAPTER XIX.
LEO AND ATTILA—THE RESCUE OF ROME.

adly and slowly after that the terrible days and weeks passed on. The great festivals of the Church were over. The daily festival of the perpetual Eucharist indeed went on with its ceaseless pleading of Redeeming death, and ceaseless participation of the ever-renewing Life, its blending of triumph and of tender tears, “Pretium et poculum,” for ever.

And day and night in Ethne’s heart Patrick’s hymn still made melody—

“Christ in the fort; Christ on the sea; Christ above, beneath, around, within, for ever.”

For in Ethne’s heart alone nothing could quench the hope that Marius would yet return.

Still came in, day after day, the tidings of mourning, lamentation, and woe. The long resistance of Aquileia had enraged the Huns to madness; and her capture and destruction had apparently awakened in them an insatiable thirst for blood and ruin. For the time even plunder seemed subordinate to mere wild waste and ravage. Week by week came the cry of cities sacked and burned and laid waste for ever; Concordia, thirty miles from Aquileia, and Altinum.

Then followed another phase of horror. The mere blind fury of revenge seemed at last assuaged; and the hideous savage hordes entered on another stage of devastation; the lust of plunder and of drunken orgies seemed to revive and gain the upper hand. The rich plains of Lombardy had been laid waste, the flourishing cities of the coast had been blotted from the earth, and now the great cities of the interior, Vicenza, Verona, Brescia, Bergamo, Pavia, and finally Milan, appalled by the fate of Aquileia, opened their gates, and from these came the tidings how the Huns, “*bacchabantur*,” were holding hideous revels and orgies there night and day. Meanwhile Rome herself had virtually no walls to defend, no gates to open. Rome, with her temples and palaces, each as a city within itself, lay absolutely defenceless and bare before the Tartar hordes.

The thunder-cloud drew nearer and nearer, and more and more the Aventine household realized their utter helplessness. It was reported that Aetius was on the point of taking flight with the Emperor. But still Leo stood firm, still the prayers went up from the basilicas. More and more the mother, the sister, and the bride seemed to find themselves most at home in the ancient churches of the catacombs, by the tombs of the martyrs of the early days, as the darkness deepened around them; until, at last, faint rumours began to creep into the city, of debate and division in the camp of Attila himself. The spell of Rome began to work; too much, his chieftains began to feel, was staked on the life of one man. The last royal life that had braved the great enchantress, the great queen City, had paid the penalty of victory by death. If Attila were to fall as Alaric had fallen, some began dimly to feel, who would hold his unwieldy empire, his hordes of many divided tribes, together? Moreover, the inevitable curse of polygamy was in Attila’s own house. Which of all the sons of his many wives would win the allegiance of these disorganized hosts? The great defeat and slaughter of the previous year, the *Hunnenschlacht*, on the plains of Châlons, could not have been forgotten; and something stronger than defeat in battle was doubtless beginning to dissolve the terrific forces of dissolution from within. Cruelty and lust and violence cannot create or unite; man remains human through all; and the avenging of such crimes must eventually grow out of the crimes themselves. No inspiring loyalty, no sacred memories or hopes, no great purpose of patriotism or even of conquest, held that vast horde together; nothing but only that one gigantic will. And if Attila hurled his life against Rome and conquered, and fell, like Alaric, what would become of his Huns? Probably, moreover, this hesitation and division of purpose began to invade the heart and will even of Attila himself.

At length the echo of these debates and divisions penetrated faintly to Rome itself, and vague suggestions began to be made of sending an embassy to Attila himself, entreating peace.

But if such an embassy were possible, who would risk themselves to be the ambassadors? Ambassadors had been sent before to Attila from the Eastern empire with a secret mission of assassination, and he had discovered it; and the ambassadors had barely escaped, through a rare generosity, with their lives. Who would venture on such an embassy from the Western empire, with such a memory of treachery confronting them? It was no mission for a soldier,—a message of abject submission and supplication;—yet to venture on it demanded more courage than any battle-field.

There could have been but one name on the lips and in the hearts of all, the name of the man whom Rome had waited for those forty days so many years before to make him her leader and bishop. There was not a hope but in Leo; not a man besides who could be trusted with such a mission, or would undertake it.

And Leo did not fail. He went; and with him two distinguished civilians—Avienus, once a consul, and Tregetius, a prefect, to propitiate Attila by two high official names,—mere names then, and long since, forgotten names, save as adjuncts to Leo. In this embassy, once more the names of the Emperor, “the Senate and People of Rome,” were united, not in a decree but a supplication; the parody of a People and Emperor and the shadow of a Senate. But the ambassador was a true Roman and a Christian, a genuine man and a living saint. And Attila had shown that he recognized a true man when he encountered him, and would listen to a saint when he saw him.

Silent among the silent multitudes the three veiled women, Damaris, Lucia, and Ethne, watched the procession leave the northern gate and wind along the plain. They felt in their inmost souls the depth of humiliation symbolized: an entreaty from the Imperial city for mercy from a Tartar savage; an appeal from the Christian Church for compassion from a heathen destroyer, the symbol of whose worship was a scimitar planted hilt downward in the earth. But in reality they all felt the appeal of Leo was from man to God, from princes in their vanity and nothingness “to the Lord of those who rule, and the King of those who reign.”

Thus once more a Roman was found to throw himself into the chasm for the salvation of Rome.

The suppliant embassy went northward to the camp of Attila in Lombardy, to the place where the Po and the Mincio meet; and the multitudes of Rome dispersed again to their various forms of labour or idleness, some of them no doubt, like the little company on the Aventine, to the basilicas

or quiet oratories to pray the great prayer of Christendom, and the prayers of Leo himself, and to wait.

They had not long to wait. Attila's movements were not slow, nor his decisions vacillating. He saw Leo and believed in him. But what can any of us say as to the Presence he *felt in* Leo, or *round about* Leo? Legend has told and Raphael has painted in his immortal picture, that he saw the apostles Peter and Paul hovering about Leo in the air, as the champions of Rome, and that Attila and his Huns cowered in terror before the heavenly vision. Prosper, Leo's own secretary, tells us simply that Leo "*committed himself to God, Who never fails to aid the labours of those who trust Him; nor did less ensue than his faith expected*." Leo, no doubt, would scarcely have been surprised at the apparition of St. Peter and St. Paul; he certainly believed that the honour and primacy of his See belonged to Peter and not to himself. But always, above and beyond Peter, Leo beheld Christ, "never relinquishing the care of His beloved flock." In that Presence he lived, and more than once we know Attila had recognized that mysterious, supernatural Presence in saintly men. The spell of Rome may indeed have been upon him, and the superstitious dread of the terrible tendency to revulsions in the affairs of men, which haunts the high places of the world; perhaps also some natural qualms of conscience for the miseries inflicted on myriads of human creatures, some echo in his heart, which was still human, of the cries of tortured men and wronged women and innocent babes. All this probably wrought for Leo, and also the kinship one great man feels for another; the weight of a spirit accustomed to rule, the force of that "saving common-sense" which often has a persuasiveness stronger than genius, and *was* the genius of Leo.

But it was something mightier than all this, we may be sure, which conquered Attila. The very best and deepest in us all, however seldom it is reached, is after all the strongest. It was the very deepest depths in Leo, the depths over which broods the living Spirit of God, that met the depths of Attila, and moved him irresistibly "to think and to do the thing that was rightful," to conquer his own evil will, and spare Rome.

Rumour says that he veiled his surrender in a grim humour which was natural to him, saying, "I can fight with men, but the wolf and the lion (Lupus and Leo) are too much for me."

But whatever the motive, surrender was made. The vast host from the eastern wilds turned back again eastward, never more to sweep in devastating floods over the West; and Leo returned in peace to the Rome he had saved.

Rome, at all events, did not receive her deliverer as Troyes had received the Bishop to whom she owed her existence. To the great city which he had defended when abandoned by all her natural defenders, Leo became thenceforth Rock and Refuge, Chief Shepherd, Supreme Ruler, Father, Pope. Thenceforth Rome and her Pope were identified. The magic of her old Imperial name was transferred to him; the granite of his ancient Roman character guarded her. Leo spoke "to the City"; the city still spoke, as no other voice could speak, to the world. The "ad Urbem" and "ad Orbem" were thenceforth not to be dissociated.

We do not hear of any pomp and ovation to do him homage on his return. The city was saved; but the salvation was from a humiliation only possible through the degradation and corruption of the city itself. And this moral degradation continued.

CHAPTER XX.
AMONG THE HUNS—LEO AND ATTILA.

ut in the midst of the tide of universal rejoicing (as in the midst of the malaria of almost universal corruption), one little fresh spring of pure and tender joy had burst forth for the household on the Aventine. The ocean tide might and did ebb back from high-water mark; but when it receded, a little fountain of sweet fresh water was found welling up from other depths below earth and sea, as sometimes on the shores of our western seas.

Slowly, with the uncertain gait of one toiling up from the ravine of the shadow of death, Marius was creeping up the Aventine, almost spent with fatigue. Ethne saw him first from the terrace above the gardens. In a moment she was at his side, and they were climbing the hill together, those two who were thenceforth to make their uphill journey together all the way.

For a moment he clasped her to his heart.

"It is through thee I am here," he said, "through thee that I ever came back at all. It is thou who hast given me back my life."

She could only murmur a few words of Patrick's hymn, and then, "I always knew He would bring thee back;" and again accepting her support for his feeble steps, they moved on till he reached the familiar portico with her.

That evening little more could be said. That "he was there," as one raised from the dead, and that "He Who brought him back was there," with them all, always, to the end, was for the hearts of all "gladness so complete," that no more could be poured in.

The welcome, the peace of home, the love, old and new, and at last the falling asleep, watched by his mother's eyes, as when he was a child, wrought wonders in one night. In the evening scarcely any eyes but those of the love that had never ceased expecting him could have recognized him, with the feeble gait, the hollow eyes, the worn, pale cheek. In the morning the soul had visibly taken her place on the throne again, and he was himself. Still the careful nurses rigidly insisted on rest, until by the next day he had gathered strength to tell his story.

"I was in the tower in Aquileia with the Lady Digna," he began. "The yells of the victorious Huns were all around us, closer and closer up the steps. When she sprang from the tower into the river, something like madness seized me, as doubtless it had seized her, and I sprang after her, with some wild hope of saving her. I sank and then rose, and seemed to grasp her robe, and swam, keeping desperate hold of it, and then clutched something with one hand, which may have been a post for fastening boats to on the other side of the river. Then something struck my head, whether a javelin from the Huns or the strong current dashing me against the point of rock I know not. I could only cry, 'Christe Domine, miserere nobis!' Then I became unconscious, and when I awoke in the night, hours afterwards, I was stretched on the opposite bank of the river, alone."

"Then thy 'Miserere' may have been the last sound on her dying ear?" said Damaris.

"I know not," he replied. "At all events, the mercy for which I cried, the Christ on Whom I called, was there, and not uncaring or asleep."

After a pause he went on—

"I was alone. It was night, but the river and all the land around were lit up by the flames of the burning city. And the silence of night was broken by exulting yells of vengeance, by cries of agony and vain entreaty, and, worse almost than all, by the hideous laughter of bacchanalian orgies.

"Something must have wounded me, for my head and hands were bleeding, and I was faint with loss of blood. But I contrived to creep under the shelter of an empty cattle-shed in the desolate fields; and there I lay, I know not how long—lay there," he continued, turning to Ethne, "until I was saved through thee.

"A poor woman of the Huns was gathering sticks for a fire, and seeing me lying there, seeming, I suppose, at the point of death, she had compassion on me. She went and brought me food and drink; and then in broken Latin, such as the barbarian tribes who settle on our frontiers learn to speak, she said, 'A Roman woman saved my son. I will save thee.' Her son was a brother of the dying boy beside whom I saw thee first at Orleans. The brother was among the wounded Huns left in the city when the siege was raised, one of those enemies whom Bishop Anianus desired the Christian women to succour, and thee among them. By degrees, as she tended me, the whole story came out; and, from her description, it could have been no one but thyself who hadst also ministered to the brother of the boy who died with his hand in thine. She was a woman of some consideration among the Huns. I should hardly have been spared but for her pleading. They had at that time no use for captive slaves, to carry about and feed, and no spark of mercy for Roman soldiers; although I think those of us who shared in the defence of Aquileia, when once the first deadly rage of vengeance was assuaged in blood, were held even by them in a kind of rough honour. Again and again I heard men among them say, 'If all Roman cities had been like Aquileia we should never have been here; but we and Rome might have been not foes but friends.'

"Also," Marius continued, turning to his mother, "I told her of thee, and," with a lowered voice to Ethne, "of thee and our betrothal, and that touched her heart. As my strength returned, I was able to be of some service to her, and she insisted on bringing me to the notice of her king, Attila himself. It was perilous, for he has frightful streaks of savage fierceness and haughtiness, not blending, but violently jarring, with occasional vibrations of affection and kindliness, and flashes of grim humour and wit, all crude and unmixed, so that you can never tell which you will find uppermost. Moreover, as you all know now, he has a wonderful keen eye and a genuine honour for *truth*, the truth of which he has had so little experience amongst us. And I suppose he felt in some way that I was true. So it happened that I was much about his court and in his presence, and saw strange and unexpected things in Attila and in his Huns. For you were right, mother," he went on, "there are no 'half beasts' in the creation of God, though, alas! there are half devils, fallen as the original devils of old. And *you* were right," he added, looking at Ethne; "if all the Christians Attila had met had been saints, indeed had been ordinarily good or true, who can say what Attila might have become?

"He has a royal contempt for mere tinsel and glitter. While his courtiers prank themselves in the borrowed splendours of the vanquished, he still wears his old Scythian skins and tanned leather. While they emulate the banquets of the Imperial court, he lives on the simplest, roughest food. It is said he never eats bread, but only meat, and that often half raw."

“An independence of cookery which scarcely disproves his likeness to the beasts,” interposed Fabricius, with a grave smile; to which Marius made no retort.

“I saw Attila among his sons,” he said, “at a banquet, accompanied by wild music, with panegyrics on him and his victorious warriors and chiefs, no doubt as harmonious and satisfactory to the Huns as the strains of Greece or the rhetoric of our Sidonius Apollinaris to our Emperor. But Attila did not seem to heed them. All the time his heart and thoughts seemed set on a young lad, his youngest son, as he kept caressing his curly hair with his hand, and jesting with the child who will, he hopes, succeed him.

“And then came the strange, grotesque pomp of his enthronement in the Imperial palace at Milan, the palace from which Constantine issued the edict proclaiming Christianity the religion of the Empire, and where the great Theodosius listened to Ambrose.

“There is a painting on the palace walls which greatly offended Attila, representing the Scythian (or some barbarian) chieftains crouching in homage (and some of them stretched vanquished and slain) before the two golden thrones of the two Emperors of the East and West. As an expiation he commanded a Roman or Greek artist, not to paint this picture out, but, leaving it to satirize to itself, to paint opposite to it another picture representing the two Emperors of East and West, laden with sacks full of the gold coin of the tribute to the Huns, humbly emptying them at the feet of Attila. Happily for me, my mother, I have not the genius of thy forefathers, and could not paint; otherwise a difficult dilemma might have been set before me. But all the time I was in the camp of the Huns, and at the court of Attila, I could not but observe an uneasiness and uncertainty and vague dread ever growing and gathering over the rude warriors, and even over Attila himself. They seemed satiated with slaughter, and in some dim way under a spell, afraid of losing their plunder, afraid of the avenging power of the civilization they were ruining, afraid of the ancient names of Italy and Rome, haunted by the fate of Alaric, our Rome’s last conqueror. Not a few of the bravest even ventured to suggest that the host should return beyond the Danube to enjoy their spoils and employ the captives they had already won.

“And then,” he concluded, “as you all know, came the embassy from suppliant Rome. Every ambition of Attila’s for the recognition of his power and glory was gratified in this appeal for mercy from the humbled Empire, from the helpless City which had so long been mistress of the nations. Leo was at the head of the procession, simple and stately, representative of the great Christian Church.

“Never to my dying day can I forget that confronting of the worshippers of the scimitar, the conquerors by force, and the disciple of the Crucified, the conqueror by the Cross;—one more great incident in the long warfare between the forces of division and of peace, of good and evil, as real as that in which ‘Satan as lightning fell from heaven,’ and perhaps not more silent.

“On one side the great barbaric host of the mighty king who had conquered and devastated Europe from the Euxine to the Baltic, in all its savage pomp and pride; on the other, the little company of peace-makers, led by our Leo, his tall, slight figure arrayed in the pontifical robes, his abundant silvery hair flowing down from beneath the silken, gold-embroidered mitre, the purple chasuble, the pallium with the small red cross on the shoulder and the large red cross on the breast, Roman courage and dignity blended with sacred majesty in his look and bearing. For some minutes there was a hush of expectation and suspense; then followed the brief speech between Attila and Leo. What was said has not been told. Some report, as no doubt you have heard, that Attila said he could fight with men, but not with the wolf and the lion (Lupus and Leo). But I believe and am sure that, whatever he said, Attila felt he was face to face with a courage nobler than his own, with a Power to save mightier than his to destroy—felt indeed that he could fight with men, but not with God.

“And so it was that Leo won the day. The countless hosts of the destroyers went back with Attila to their own place among their wildernesses; the little embassy of the peace-makers went back with Leo to Rome. And Rome is saved.”

CHAPTER XXI.
ON THE SABINE HILLS.

t was not many days after the rescue of Rome from the Huns by Leo that Baithene came back from Ireland. He found the city full of noise and stir, the people crowding to the Circensian games; the Coliseum echoing to the shouts of the spectators of the chariot races, athletic games, and dramatic performances.

Rome had not indeed received her deliverer as for a time misguided Troyes had received the Bishop who had risked his life for her. But her response to the great gift of her rescue was far from satisfactory to Leo.

When Baithene reached the Aventine, he found the family absent in the basilica, at the Festival of St. Peter and St. Paul. He followed them thither, and through the betrothal veils recognized Ethne and Lucia, with Damaris, Fabricius, and Marius. And resounding through the lofty pillared spaces, once more he heard the voice of Leo in grave warning and remonstrance.

"The religious devotion, beloved," he said, in deep and mournful tones, "with which, at the time of our chastening and our liberation, all the people of the faithful flowed together to render thanks to God in acts of praise was soon neglected by almost all. This has given sore pain to my heart, and has also smitten it with fear. For the peril is great when men are ungrateful to God, and by their forgetfulness of His benefits show that they neither feel compunction at reproof, nor rejoice in their remission and pardon. Therefore, beloved, I dread lest this voice of the prophet should be applicable to us—'I have scourged them and they have not mourned, they would not accept correction'; for how can correction have been accepted by hearts so turned away? It shames me to say it, but it is necessary not to be silent; more is rendered to demons than to apostles, and insane spectacles are more frequented than the shrines of the martyrs. Who has restored this city to safety? Who has rescued her from captivity? Who has defended her from slaughter? Is it the games of the circus? or is it the care of the saints, through which the sentence of Divine condemnation was softened, so that we who had deserved wrath might be preserved for pardon?

"I beseech you, let this saying of the Saviour touch your hearts, Who, when by His might and His compassion He had cleansed ten lepers, observed that only one of them came back to give thanks; signifying that those ungrateful ones, although by an act of pity they had obtained health of body, retained, through their impiety, disease in their souls. Lest such a sentence should be pronounced, beloved, on you, turn ye back and consider, and understand the wonderful things that He has deigned to accomplish for us; that, no longer attributing our liberation (as some impious ones have done) to the operation of the stars, but to the unspeakable mercy of Almighty God, Who deigned to soften the hearts of the furious barbarians, we may unite together in full vigour of faith in the commemoration of such a benefit. Grave negligence must be remedied by testimonies of gratitude all the greater." Then tenderly reminding them of the sufferings of the saints and martyrs, Peter and Paul, whom they were commemorating, he commended them to the mercy of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

It was in the porch of the basilica, as the congregation dispersed, that the family of the Aventine first met again. When they reached the gardens of the palace, and sat in the shade of the ilexes, there was much to hear and tell. From Ireland the tidings were full of joy. The Irish chieftain, on hearing of the welcome of his son and daughter in the Christian household at Rome, had laid aside his last faint hesitation as to embracing Christianity, and had been baptized by Patrick at the great Easter Baptism. He and his wife welcomed Lucia to their hearts and kingdom; they trusted to receive her as a daughter in the place of the daughter they were willing to give as a bride to Marius, however sore the parting might be to them. They only stipulated that, as soon as might be in those perilous days, the four might come back to Ireland; Baithene and Lucia to remain as the joy of their home, and the stay and strength of the clan; and Ethne and Marius to sojourn there as long as they could be spared from their Roman home. Also they desired that Baithene should for a time take a fair dwelling of his own in Rome, to receive his sister there, that she might be led thence, as became a lady of free and noble birth, to the house of her bridegroom. And they consented, they even generously wished, for the sake of their own country and people, that Baithene and Lucia should remain a year or two in Rome, that he might bring home to their far-off Ireland the learning and training of that great city, which they understood to have been so long the centre of the world's greatness and wisdom, and the channel of Divine wisdom and order to the Christian Church.

Thus in the midst of that tumultuous, tormented age, began one of those quiet melodies of love and rest which are always flowing on in soft musical tones through the din of storms and wars, scarcely heard at all in the great orchestral chorus of history, yet without which the world itself, and therefore its history, would soon fall back into chaos and cease to be.

First came the betrothal. Fabricius and Damaris kept to ancient customs as far as might be, Damaris leaning to the rites of her Greek forefathers, and both of them to the customs of those early Greek Christians of Rome, to whom the Greek inscriptions of more than two centuries in the catacombs bore witness. The ceremonies of the veiling and the ring were therefore celebrated at the betrothal, which took place in the Oratory of the Ecclesia Domestica on the Aventine. There also were given the dowry by the fathers of the brides, the Irish chieftain and Fabricius, with the "*Arrhae*," or pledge in money; there also the hands of the betrothed were joined, the sacred kiss given, and the ring placed on the hand of the bride, a signet ring, in token that she should henceforth seal and have charge of her husband's property; and there, finally, they received the solemn benediction of the priest. Afterwards the betrothed separated, Lucia returning to her father's house, and Ethne going with Baithene to a country house belonging to Fabricius, among the Sabine hills, high amidst the wooded mountains above the town of Subiaco.

This separation was considered as especially important in their case, in order to efface all traces of captivity and bondage; that the marriage might be recognized as between those who always had been and were for ever free men and free women. For so deep and enduring was the degradation stamped legally and socially on the slave, that there had been a prolonged contest, scarcely yet decided, whether marriage between slaves was to be treated as legal marriage at all; whilst marriage between a free woman and a slave was regarded as in a sense a crime; and marriage between a free man and a slave woman was liable to be annulled at any moment. It was therefore arranged that the forty days between the betrothal and the marriage festival, customarily spent together by the betrothed apart from each other, should be spent together by the brother and sister in the villa on the Sabine hills.

To Ethne, and indeed to both of them, those days were like a fresh baptism into childhood. The long year of humiliation and terrible suspense was over; to their unspeakable joy their father had become a Christian; and their parents in Ireland were content. Bright visions of re-union with his people were before Baithene; and before Ethne hope of a life of noble service with him to whom her heart was given. But she was to devote these weeks to the dear companion of all her past life, in an island of rest between the past and the future, in the midst of the voyage of life.

As the great Roman thoroughfare, the Via Valeria, branched off into the narrower road along the banks of the Anio, and climbed up the mountains by Sublaqueum and the Roman villa of Nero, her spirits rose at every step. As they passed picturesque village after village perched for safety on the crests of the hills, or plunged deeper and deeper into the mountains and among the luxuriant forests, her whole spirit seemed to rise and breathe the bracing air of the heights. The country house was comparatively simple; the decorations and conveniences of the villa of the Roman noble, hot and cold baths, halls and corridors with mosaic floors, and quiet inner chambers, were there; but the corridor in front was like a trellised rustic pergola, with the vines clustering around the pillars. It opened on a terrace from which there was immediate access to the free wild hills. Baithene, from his long residence there with Fabricius, was familiar with it all, at home with the place and the people; his many acts of care and kindness had won for them both an enthusiastic welcome, which almost made the brother and sister feel as if they were amongst the men and women of their own clan; they were understood, beloved, and honoured there, and free to do what they would, and go whither they would, without restraint.

Baithene knew all the mountain paths, and it was their delight to climb crag after crag with feet nimble as the wild goat's, to gaze from the heights across fold after fold of the great range of the Apennines, or over the lower hills to the far-off plains and the sea. But most of all, Ethne's delight was in the fountains and streams, the springs bubbling up on the hill-sides, and pouring out their crystal waters from under the crags.

"We have come once more from the aqueducts to the fountains," she said; "the waters are no more imprisoned and enslaved in rigid stone channels, they are free. And we are free," she added, "free to go forth like them, and make the world glad, and to minister freely to its humblest needs."

For they were indeed in a land of fountains and brooks, which run among valleys and hills; the Aqua Marcia, and the Aqua Claudia, and the Fons Ceruleus of heavenly blue, the crystal springs which fed the waters of the great Claudian aqueduct, kept perennially full the magnificent fountains of Rome, and sparkled in Constantine's porphyry basins in the great baptistery of the Lateran.

Many a gracious kindness they found means and opportunities of doing to the peasantry, and the dull, cowed expression on many of the faces was for them transfigured into a trusting smile of welcome. The heavy, universal shadow of slavery weighed indeed on all the toilers; yet a hope dawned on Ethne of penetrating it with the light of Christian redemption and human brotherhood. Thus for the most part those happy days were for both of them a bathing of body, soul, and spirit in the fountain of youth, in the beauty and strength and freedom of nature.

"I was a glad and sunny child,
  And in the Fount of Life,
Which, gushing from its hidden cave,
In many a clear and sparkling wave,
  Each with sweet music rife,
Wells in the morning sunlight up
  E'en to its stony brim,
Dropping into each flowery cup
  That trembles on the rim;
Each joyous chime and merry burst,
As fresh and glad as 'twere the first,
I bathed and quenched my healthy thirst
  Until my heart grew wild.
And in the still and sultry hours,
When nature drooped and was sad,
  Weary with thirst and heat,
  The tread of my light feet,
  Was cool and musical,
  As when at evening fall
Drop by drop in lonely pools the summer
      showers,
And the desert looked up and was glad.
  I strove with the maddened storm,
I leapt the crag with the water-fall;
  For the blood in my veins was warm,
And storms and streams and gleams and all
The mighty creatures of the wild,
  In their wild, exulting play
They welcomed me to their company,
And they laughed to see a human child
  As strong and as glad as they."

CHAPTER XXII.
A MEETING OF THE WATERS.

t last the day of the nuptials came. Before dawn Ethne and Baithene started with the lectica and the cavalcade, and pausing once on the way, at last reached the great basilica of the Lateran. There the party from the Aventine met them, and Marius himself wondered at the fresh power and beauty in Ethne's face, the radiant glow, the shining of the happy eyes. The sadness and the worn, weary look had indeed passed out of his own face, but still he felt as if the weight of the ages rested on him in comparison with her.

"It is the old world wedding the new," he said to her with a tender gravity.

"I have been among the fountains," she said; "we are going there together."

"*You* are my fountain of youth," he answered; "I need no other."

The Bishop and the priests met and received them at the porch, and they entered the great basilica; it was crowded. Bishop Leo himself wasto give the benediction, and the rank of the betrothed, the romance of the foreign, far-off origin of Ethne and Baithene, the story of their sorrows and their joys, had gathered a great company together, touched with a sympathy unusually real and deep.

The white and purple veil was folded by the Bishop himself around the bride; at the close of the ceremony he solemnly joined the hands of bride and bridegroom, laid his own hands on their heads, and then through the vast spaces of Constantine's basilica, in his grave, deep tones sounded the benediction—"O God, Who by Thy mighty power hast made all things out of nothing, Who, after other things set in order, didst appoint that out of man created in Thine own image and similitude woman should take her beginning, teaching that it should never be lawful to put asunder those whom Thou hadst pleased should be created out of one! O God, Who hast consecrated the state of matrimony to such an excellent mystery (or sacrament), that in it Thou didst typify the sacrament (or mystery) of Christ and the Church! O God, by Whom woman is joined to man, and so blessed a union was instituted at the beginning, as not to be destroyed even by the judgment of the Flood, look mercifully upon this Thy servant now to be joined in wedlock, who seeks to be defended by Thy protection. May there be on her the yoke of love and peace; may she be a faithful and chaste wife in Christ, and may she continue a follower of holy women; may she be lovable to her husband as Rachel, wise as Rebecca, long-lived and faithful as Sarah. May she strengthen her weakness by the help of discipline; may she be modest, grave, bashful, and instructed in godly learning; and may she see her sons' sons to the third and fourth generation; and may she reach the rest of the blessed in the Kingdom of Heaven."

As the last act of the ceremonial, the Bishop placed on the head of Ethne a golden crown, of Greek workmanship, and on that of Lucia a golden diadem, delicately wrought with fine Celtic art. Ethne would rather have chosen a crown of flowers, but the gold was considered an honour due to her birth, as for Lucia it was a token of the rank Baithene was able to offer her.

And so with pomp and music the bridal company were conducted to the old palace on the Aventine. When they were alone together, Damaris blessed her son and Baithene according to the old Greek form of her people—"The servant of the Lord is crowned for the sake of the handmaid of the Lord, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

And afterwards to her daughter and Ethne she said—"The handmaid of the Lord is crowned for the sake of the servant of the Lord." Then embracing them with tears, she said the ancient words—"With glory and honour didst Thou crown them, Thou hast placed a crown of precious stones upon their heads;" and she added in her own words with a radiant smile—"These golden crowns, beloved, will be offered in a few days on the altar in the church, but ye shall be a crown of joy to each other for ever."

Afterwards she gave a little sealed packet to Ethne. It contained a precious jewelled clasp of oriental workmanship from Miriam, with the words from the old Hebrew marriage ritual written in Latin folded round it—"Make these two to rejoice with joy according to the joyousness which Thou gavest to the work of Thy hands in the Garden of Eden of old."

Before long Ethne and Marius went away to the country house, now so dear and familiar to her, amongst the Sabine hills; whilst Baithene and Lucia remained to be the son and daughter of Fabricius and Damaris in the old palace on the Aventine.

CHAPTER XXIII.
FULFILMENTS AND DREAMS ON THE SABINE HILLS.

hus Ethne went back to be the light and joy of the home among the mountains, which had grown so familiar to her; but she came with a new light and a new joy. The gaiety and buoyancy of her race, and the free, imaginative delight in nature were still there, but there was added the tender grace of matronhood; the old world and the new, the sunset and the dawn, had blended; the weight of the cares of that old world of Marius were on her, as the power of her new hope was on him.

"It is *conjugium*," they said, "no mere (*contubernium*) dwelling together, but *working under a yoke* together; His yoke which is fruitful, His burden which makes us run the swifter, as 'the burden of wings to a bird, or sails to a ship.'"

For always the burden of this universal slavery, which was crushing the Roman world, weighed on Ethne; denying as it did the sanctity of married life to the toiling many, and making unholy life so terribly easy to the luxurious few; degrading all, in fact, to one level of evil, because virtually rejecting the sacred equality of a common humanity. The Christian Church had indeed begun her long battle with this evil as with all others; but to Ethne, coming from a social life of another kind, entangled no doubt with its own difficulties and wrongs, but not debased with these, it seemed as if the way made hitherto through all these centuries of Christianity was very little.

"It was written so long ago," she said, "that tender letter of Paul the Apostle interceding for a runaway slave. Not even a good slave, but 'unprofitable.' Yet the great Apostle calls him 'My own son in the faith,' and says to his master—'Receive him not as a slave, but a brother beloved.' To the master, think, four hundred years ago! And what master acknowledges this now?"

"Scarcely even our own Leo," Marius said. "Does not this perplex thee in Leo?"

"Why should it?" she said. "Does not Leo himself say to God continually, 'We can do nothing good without Thee'? I suppose if he finds by and by that he has made a mistake, he will say in his humility, as he would say now if he saw it, 'I must have done that without Thee.' Besides, beloved, it is not so easy, I know, for him or for you, or for any of us, even to '*think* the thing that is rightful,' much less to do it."

"What indeed can we do?" he said. "To emancipate the slaves would be to doom them to starvation, unprotected, disorganized, helpless, degraded."

"We must *be* Christian," she said, with her victorious smile, "and let the rest follow! We must love them, worship with them, believe in the image of God in them, however defaced; in the brotherhood of Christ with them, however unrecognized. He is sure to conquer in the end. And He is sure to give us our bit of His battle to fight."

One day of their wanderings together among the mountains remained stamped for ever on Ethne's heart. The dusk was falling on the valleys, but on a crest of the mountains above them, a temple of the ancient gods (Marius believed of Apollo) shone golden in the evening light. A little company of mountain folk were moving slowly towards the portals, bearing a lamb garlanded for sacrifice. After a time they reappeared, and a strain of wild, weird music wound in and out, echoing among the hills. Heathen rites were indeed still practised there, and forbidden worship was still offered, which would not have been ventured on in less remote places. At the same time, below, on the other side, on the top of a low hill near them, Ethne saw a rude uncouth wooden cross, like a gibbet, standing alone, stretching out its arms; a ghastly horror confronting the beautiful marble temple on the height.

At the foot of that uncouth cross knelt a man, clothed in rough dark garments, with a sheepskin capote, such as was worn by the shepherds of the region. But as they drew nearer Ethne saw that his head was tonsured. His arms were clasped around the cross. Ethne and Marius stopped beside him and reverently bowed their heads. They felt in a sacred place.

"*Patibulum crucis*, the gibbet of the cross!" Marius said in a low voice, quoting a well-known Ambrosian hymn. "The legend in the country is, that this cross is the last left of a multitude on which the vanquished slaves of one of the terrible Servile Wars were crucified ages ago. The cross, you know, was a punishment only awarded to a slave."

Ethne's whole face quivered, and tears streamed from her eyes. As they stood there speechless, the kneeling figure arose. Approaching them, and seeing Ethne weeping, the stranger said, looking up at the cross, "Lady, *dost thou understand*?"

She could not speak. She had indeed understood too keenly. Then a radiant joy shone from the stranger's face, and looking up at the pagan temple glistening on the opposite height, with a slight accent which they recognized as Greek—

"*This* will conquer *that*," he said; and looking down on a fetter on one of his wrists, he added, "will conquer *that* and *this*. I also have been a slave."

"No longer a slave," she murmured, taking his hard, wrinkled, aged hand in hers, "a brother beloved!"

"Thou dost indeed understand!" he replied, in a tremulous voice. "But how couldst thou have known? I also was a runaway slave. I was in one of the stateliest and most wicked households in Rome; myself among the worst there,—only a child in years, but old in degradation and sin,—when one memorable day, at the games in the Coliseum, in the arena suddenly appeared that unknown monk from the Egyptian deserts, and tried to stop the combat, and was listened to for a moment, and then crushed to death beneath the shower of stones. But he saved Rome from that iniquity for ever, and he saved me! The vision of that sacrifice of pity haunted me night and day, until I fled from that den of iniquity—fled hither to the Cross, to the Christ, for ever."

And without another word he left them, and vanished among the rocks.

"Was it an angel of God?" Ethne said, when he was gone.

"An angel of God to us at all events, my beloved," Marius replied, as they walked slowly homeward.

Those were, moreover, to Ethne, months of much happy learning of many things. Still in many ways a child of the wilderness, it was a constant joy to her to learn through Marius the secrets of his ancient world. And above all, she delighted, with ever-increasing wonder and joy, in drinking with him of what to her, lover of all fountains, was the new and perennial fountain of "the Testaments of God."

"Freedom, law, life: order, beauty, truth: everything is there," she would say. "My own people at home cannot indeed taste of all the riches of your learning. But they can have, they will have, through Patrick they *have* this, the best of all!"

In another of these walks among the deepest recesses of the hills, they came on a little cluster of dwellings which had a different look from those around. Flocks of sheep were feeding high up on the sweet mountain pastures, and a boy and girl were watching them. At the door of the farm buildings stood a young woman, with a fine expressive face and large dark eyes, and, beside her, her husband, an athletic, soldierly-looking man, apparently some years older than his wife. They greeted Ethne and Marius with a frank equal greeting, very different from the shrinking or sullen look common among the slave labourers. There was something in the young wife's face which greatly attracted Ethne, and seemed familiar to her in a way she could not account for. When they passed the farm she said to Marius—

"Those people seem more like our own upper clansmen at home than any others I have seen here. Who are they?"

"The man was a centurion," he replied. "After one of the late Eastern wars, he left the army and retired here to his father's lands. His mother is said to be of Gothic birth, and his wife comes of some Eastern race. I believe his father was of ancient Sabine descent, as ancient as our own. Would to heaven there were more such! I think then Rome need not fear the Goths!"

"Are they Christians?" Ethne asked.

"They are," he replied. "Christians, it is said, from the days of Nero."

Thus the months passed swiftly on in a deep calm flow of peace and love; whilst meantime Baithene was devoting himself with single-hearted earnestness to learning everything of art or science, of handicraft or state-craft, of law or literature, that would be of use to his people.

Before long a tragic echo from the world outside did indeed break in on this sunny calm.

The year after the retreat of the Huns from Italy and rescued Rome, came the news how, at one more of his numerous nuptials, with a beautiful young maiden called Ildico (a name which seemed a suspicious echo of some Gothic word enfeebled by Latin lips), on the day after the wedding, after waiting until late in the afternoon, at last the attendants ventured in to see what their master might require, and found him stretched on his face on the bed, quite dead, the blood which had streamed from his face staining the ground below; while the bride sat weeping beside him, closely veiled, and speechless.

No explanation was ever made as to how it happened: if by the hands of the young bride, no vengeance seems to have followed; if as the result of the hard drinking at the wedding feast, this did not lessen the lamentations of his people. For them indeed all their long career of victory and plunder ended with the life of their chief. His Tartar horsemen wheeled with wild lamentations around his bier. He was buried in secret, and the captives and slaves who laid him beneath the earth were killed when their work was done, that none might ever violate his grave. No man knoweth of his tomb to this day; and his empire crumbled into dust with its founder.

The death of Attila did indeed remove a great weight of dread from the wretched Imperial court and from the falling Empire. It remained to be seen whether, after all, it would prove to have been only the lifting off of a weight which had crushed the crumbling State for the moment into some semblance of consolidation.

Soon after the tidings reached Marius and Ethne on their mountain heights, he missed her from his side, and found her kneeling in her chamber weeping bitterly.

"I know the relief it is to Rome and the world," she said. "I did not want thee to see me in tears; but I could not help weeping for that poor heathen king. If only he had met a few more Christians like Lupus and our Leo, who knows but the heart of the beast might have gone out of him, and he might have become a man again. For he was born a human babe of a human mother."

Marius said nothing, but drew her out among the hills and streams to soothe and comfort her. Their way that day lay by a road they did not often take, by the ruins of the magnificent villa of Nero, below the artificial lakes, into which he had gathered the waters from the hills. The lakes were still there, crystal clear from the fountains, heavenly blue under that Italian sky, or steeped in depths of varied colour from the reflections of the craggy steeps and wooded slopes around them.

As they stood there Ethne said—

"If only we Christians had remained what the martyrdoms of Nero made us in that awful night at Rome, torches to illuminate the city and the world, how bright the city and the world would have been before this!"

"In truth," he replied, "it is not martyrdom we have to dread, but the deadly chill in our own hearts. And that," he added, "every day and for ever thou keepest away from me. And by and by thou shalt take me to thy country, where the Christians are still early Christians, of the stamp of Nero's Christians; away to thy land of the fountains and the saints."

"Beloved," she said, smiling, "you also have your fountains; and Ireland has not all or only saints."

Sweet human hopes came dawning on the two homes. The year of the death of Attila brought two little sons to the palace on the Aventine and the house among the Sabine hills.

The joy was very great in both homes. If Ethne had been as a fountain of youth to Marius, these babes seemed to bring back youth to Damaris. She travelled backwards and forwards in a flutter of new possession and new hope from Rome to the mountains. North and south, the new world and the old seemed visibly blended in those two precious blossoms of new human life.

"The sunset has indeed met the dawn," she said, "and naturally the dawn has conquered, and there is a new day."

On one of Damaris' first visits to Ethne the mother, Ethne said—

"Mother," calling her thus for the first time, "I have had a beautiful dream. I saw Nero's villa, and the heathen temple, and the slave huts dissolve before my eyes. And, instead, a fair church shone on one of the mountains (Monte Cassino, I think Marius called it), the music of sweet psalms echoed among the hills, and happy peasants, instead of taking sheep and lambs garlanded for sacrifice to the pagan temples, brought home their

little children from the church, in white robes of baptism. And a holy man clad in white woollen robes met them from the church on the mountain. And I thought he was a man of your old Anician house.[6] And from the church came troops of white-robed men following them; and from the lakes poured forth a great river plashing and dashing through valley and plain on to Rome, and on and on through the world, to our far West and everywhere; and everywhere it brought with it freshness and gladness and life. What can that mean? Must it not mean something very good for this darling and for the world?"

"Thou wilt bring thy little son to God, and God will surely make him a fountain of blessing to the world," said Damaris, very tenderly. "But we scarcely needed a dream to promise us that!"

Then very earnestly Ethne added to Marius—

"This child may be called Paul, may he not? Because of Paul's conquering Nero, and because of his letter to the master about his slave." Which request was solemnly promised to be fulfilled, and the mother forbidden to discourse any further for the time.

Lucia, meantime, having in vain sought loyally for a Celtic name which Latin lips could pronounce, and which would not seem too barbarous for her little son, finally contented herself and every one with the name of Patrick, the Apostle of the Irish.

And so, when the next Baptismal Festival came, at the Epiphany, the two babes were brought to the baptistery of Constantine at the Lateran.

And there, in the water from the fountains on the Sabine hills (as Ethne liked to think), the Aqua Claudia and the Fons Ceruleus, the two little sons of Rome and Ireland were baptized by the great Bishop Leo, and sent forth on their journey of life, to be known thenceforth by the dear and consecrated names of Paul and Patrick.

CHAPTER XXIV.
THE LAND OF THE MORNING.

oon after the baptism the longing of Ethne's heart was granted. She and Marius, with Baithene and Lucia and the babes, set off on their long journey to the old Irish home.

They started from Ostia, the port of Rome, from the quays on the Tiber (near the house where St. Monica had died), and coasted to Marseilles, where they landed. Thence they crossed the Visigothic kingdom to the mouth of the Loire, where they chartered an armed vessel for Ireland. Britain it was not possible to cross, torn as it then was by the successive irruptions from the north, Saxon, Jute, and Angle, which for the time made it heathen, but in the end, as we know, made it England. They touched at the cove (Perran Porth) on the western coast, still in the hands of the Britons, where Ethne and Baithene had listened to the epistle of Patrick and to the bell in the little church.

To all of them that little bay was a shrine of sacred memories and a spring of inexhaustible hope. They brought the babes across the sandy cove into the little church, with offerings of gold and silver, and laid them in the arms of the priest for benediction. And then they set sail again across the Irish Channel.

At the mouth of the river Boyne they drew the large flat-bottomed sea-galley up on the sands, and they made their way across the country to the house of the chieftain, the father of Ethne and Baithene. But for Dewi they would hardly have found it. The old chieftain and his wife could not endure the house on the cliff after it had been robbed of the treasures of their hearts by the pirates. For a time the very sight of the sea was terrible to the mother's heart, like the sight of a blood-stained dagger that had been plunged into the hearts of her children; and they had gone to live on other lands belonging to the clan, near the river Blackwater.

There Ethne and Baithene, with the babes, were welcomed home. That welcome brought a new revelation of what love and loyalty can mean to the hearts of Marius and Lucia. Every man and woman in the regions round rejoiced over them with great joy, as at the return of a son or daughter of their own; and also of something unutterably more important than any son or daughter of theirs could ever be, born chief and lady, yet flesh of their flesh and bone of their bone, the glory of their clan, the pride of their hearts, for whom every drop of their own hearts' blood was due, and would have been freely given.

Marius and Lucia, subjects of a corrupt court, whose Imperial families had often no past and therefore no future, to whom the throne was a mere front seat at a revel or a theatre, and the crown a mere decoration, felt here for the first time the overwhelming tide of the passion of loyalty. Citizens of a city which had no genuine common life of its own, which had flourished too long by draining out all the national and patriotic life in others, they learned for the first time what could be meant by the words Patria, Fatherland, Mother-tongue. Masters of a household of slaves, they had for the first time a glimpse of the honour there could be in loyal homage, to those who received and those who rendered it, of the faithfulness there could be in service based on kinship and affection. And simple as the dwelling was, with halls and chambers of clay and timber, to Marius and Lucia there was an inner grandeur in it higher than all the marble palaces of Ravenna or Rome.

"Sister," he said to Lucia, when they were alone, "your husband takes you out of a crumbling mass, of which you were simply the upper crust, and grafts you into a living tree, of which you and yours will be the fairest branch."

The chieftain and his wife stood at the door of the hall to welcome them. Their garments were homespun from the wool of their own flocks dyed in native dyes. But they stood there every inch royal in the grace of their reception of the strangers; and also in every pulse mother and father as they pressed the son and daughter to their hearts, and took the babes tenderly in their arms.

Afterwards Lucia said to Ethne—

"I would have expected that thy father and mother and thy close kindred should be like thee, princely and simple, royally regarding the wants and claims of all, and with sympathetic discrimination measuring the differences in place and character of each. But this charm goes through all your people; there is not one clown, one obtrusive, awkward person amongst them. Every one is as respectful to you as if you were their queen, and as much at home with you as if you were their sister. How is it?"

"I know not," said Ethne, blushing at the tender compliment, "unless it is that I *am* as a princess and a sister to them, and that we all belong to each other, as the stem to the flower and the flower to the fruit; each content with its own place, and not wanting or deeming it possible to take the place of any one else."

"But that would be like the Kingdom of Heaven, my sister," said Lucia.

"I suppose the Kingdom of Heaven *is* the one Family of the Heavenly Father and the Divine King," said Ethne meditatively; "and I suppose that is the ideal and the pattern of the clan. And you will find it a help in striving to make it what it should be, to comprehend the highest it can mean. But, my sister," she added, sighing, "alas! I fear all chiefs and all clans are not what they should be, either to each other or among themselves."

For only that morning she had heard how one chieftain among Patrick's converts, King Leoghaire, had commanded his sons to bury him withhis face turned towards his foes, on the ramparts of the hill of Tara—"with his face turned southwards towards the men of Leinster, as fighting with them, for he was the enemy of the men of Leinster all his life."

Baithene had told Ethne and Marius this, on which Marius had mournfully observed—

"Is this then also a land of divisions and crumblings? Do the men of Leinster and the men of Ulster hate each other as the Huns hate the Romans and the Saxons the Britons?"

And Ethne had replied—

“Beloved, I am afraid the whole world is a land of divisions and dissolvings. What Patrick has brought us is the one universal Church of the One Living God, as he told the princesses of our race at the well—‘*Our God is the God of all men*’ If our Ireland, if your Italy, can live in His life, we shall be *one* and at peace, and strong. And this is what we in our little way, what Patrick and Leo in their great way, are labouring for night and day, heart and soul, every day and for ever.”

It became indeed clear to them all, that in Ireland and elsewhere the world is a battle-field, because the heart of every one in it is a battle-field.

Not long after that, it is said, one of the greatest of the Irish saints was baptized with the double name of Wolf and Dove.[7]

“If only,” Marius said, “we could keep the *Church* from becoming a battle-field! As yet, Ireland seems to have no heretics—Manicheans, Arians, or Eutychians.”

“Only in the germ, at all events,” said Ethne. “I suppose the germs of all the heresies and sins are everywhere.”

But although they were too near the seat of judgment and the throne of rule not to see the dark as well as the bright side, Lucia and Marius felt they had come as to a sacred hearth, glowing with love and life, warm with the natural warm-heartedness of the race towards their own, and still more with the glow of first love in the hearts of Patrick’s Christians.

It was near Easter when they arrived, the great season of the baptisms. Only three years before, Ethne and Baithene, with Ethne their mother, had been baptized among the first converts. And now well-nigh the whole clan—old and young, children and grey-haired men and women—gathered as catechumens around Patrick and his priests for instruction. It was a time of wonderful awakening and joy. Marius had seen Rome lit up for Easter, and at Ravenna darkness turned into day through the night of Easter Eve, by the gigantic candles and torches flaming along all the streets. But never did any illumination seem to him so festive as this in that far-off barbaric island, which the glory of the sunrise had so lately touched.

The halls of Ethne’s home were lit up with torches; every hut and cabin had its humble illumination; and the hills flamed the good news to one another from summit to summit, the great Easter greeting, “*The Lord is risen*,” “*He is risen indeed!*”

And when the firelight melted into the dawn, the white-robed catechumens were awake and moving in festive processions from place to place, and all the land was full of songs of joy—new songs. Patrick throughout his mission to Ireland from the beginning had aimed straight at the hearts of her people, at the consciences of her chiefs, at the hearts of her poets.

Among his first converts was the chief poet, Dubthach, the Laureate of the nation. And now new songs were pouring forth from their lips. Their harps were strung to the heavenly music, so that from the beginning, for Ireland, the harp became the symbol at once of patriotism and faith.

From the first all that was best and noblest and wisest in the land—all the artistic skill, all the wisdom and knowledge Ireland had—were laid at the feet of Christ. Druids and bards became priests and singers of the Christian Church. Not as an iconoclast of all the beauty and wisdom already existing did Christianity win Ireland; but consecrating all that was already wise, perfecting all that was already beautiful. As far as possible the existing organization was accepted. Bishops were the bishops, not of a territory, but of a clan, or kindred group of men. The old laws were not destroyed, but expanded and raised into the new. Patrick, though himself a Gallo-Roman, learnt in every sense the language of the people, the language of their hearts. There is scarcely another European nation that has, breathing through the first moments of its Christian life, a hymn in its own mother-tongue. But Patrick’s hymn was the *Hymnus Scoticus*, the Irish hymn in which every peasant mother could teach her little children “the Practice of the Presence of God,” binding daily round them as a constant “lorica” or breastplate in the daily battle the invocation—

“Christ within us,
Christ around us;
Christ beneath
us,
Christ above us,”

always and for ever.

And, moreover, in every place where he came and founded a colony of Christians, Patrick left, if possible, a copy of the Gospels, or both “the Testaments of God.” These were indeed in Latin, but then, necessarily, Latin was the key to the treasuries of all the ages. And Patrick in bringing Ireland into the kingdom of God brought her also into the inheritance of all the civilized past, lifting in a sacred ark above the floods of Danish barbarism and Moslem fanaticism, so soon to sweep over the nations, not only the revelation of God, but the wisdom of Greece and Rome.

Fifty years afterwards, the queenly Saint Brigit, then a babe in arms, had arisen, and (herself also a captive and a slave) had gathered men and women around her in thousands to the feet of Christ. Before that century had closed, the light and warmth of Christianity had penetrated into the remotest regions of the land, north and south, east and west; to Donegal, Derry, Banchor, and Connaught. Before another century had closed, from the fountains of the Irish monasteries the living waters had poured forth through Scotland and England, Gaul, Switzerland, and Germany; whilst to those fountains themselves, kings, nobles, men of letters from all parts, all who longed for fresher Christian life and deeper human learning, had come to drink. All this Marius could not know, but he felt the glow of the morning, felt that he had indeed found the Fountain of Youth. And all his life afterwards he would say to Ethne, when the days were darkest and the battle fiercest—

“The sun is shining still in thy land, beloved! We may be sure the battle is a victory there.”

CHAPTER XXV.
CHAOS AND CREATION IN CHRISTENDOM.

thne and Marius needed indeed all the brightness of the memory of that dawn in Ireland to sustain them; for the hour of parting had to come, and they were going back into a world of perplexity and peril. The mother and father and the people who loved Ethne so dearly had to be left. One of the clan was to go with Ethne, that the sound of her mother-tongue might not die away from her hearing, and that it might be learned by lisping lips in the home on the Aventine. The nurse who had thrown the plaid around the brother and sister on the night of the capture, had naturally taken little Paul to her inmost heart, and was to sail with them. And also Dewi the Welshman, who had grafted himself into the clan; and Bran the deer-hound. Meanwhile Lucia kept a Roman girl with her, that Latin also might grow up as a mother-tongue in her Irish home.

And so at last Ethne and her husband departed; and then for the first time the weight of exile and separation pressed on her heart. As long as there was any one—father, mother, brother, clansman—to cheer and sustain, every thought that had a gleam of hope in it came to her heart and lips; but when the ship went on her outward way, and the familiar shores were left behind, too possibly for ever, amidst the "perils by the way" of every journey in those unquiet times, she discovered how her heart had always been instinctively turning thither where her steps might be no more. She felt how even their violent capture by the pirates had been no such wrench as this quiet departure by her own will. Then she had still belonged to the land she was leaving, and at every step away from it she had sustained herself and Baithene by the thought, that whichever way the road seemed to lead, it was really only a little way round back to the home. Everything, she had felt, was really working for the good of the fatherland; every treasure of knowledge or good of any kind was in some way to be laid up in that familiar casket. And now it was not her steps only, it was her heart, her life, that was going forth to this great wide Europe, to this far-off new home.

Marius was with her indeed, and her heart was in the truest sense his and their little Paul's. But Paul also was to be a Roman, to live for Rome, for this southern world, not for Ireland. With an unconquerable instinct her heart at first turned for consolation to Fedelm, her old nurse, and to Bran the dog, who had insisted on coming with her. On the old nurse's breast and on Bran's shaggy head fell the tears, the only tears that brought any comfort.

And Marius knew it and understood it all, and never felt a grain of distrust or displeasure, and never tormented her with consolations. It was not, however, until they reached Tours that he said a word to her to imply that he knew. She had crept out alone to the cathedral, to the tomb of St. Martin, where she and Baithene had conversed with the old monk who knew the saint. The only words she could remember just then from their interview were the words of Martin which had baffled the devil, "*Let me see the print of the nails*."

"The print of the nails," she sobbed softly to herself, "the print of the nails! It has indeed to be also in us! To follow Thee means this, not only carrying the Cross as a burden and singing as we go, but being transfixed to it, and not being able to sing at all, only to say softly—'Into Thy hands.' '*The print of the nails.*' So let it be."

And as she turned away, comforted, she saw Marius watching her in the shadow of the font.

"My fountain of youth!" he murmured, tenderly.

"Ah, beloved," she said, "what freshness of youth or what water of life can there be in me?"

"More than ever perhaps," he said, "when my fountain of youth has become a fountain of tears. The world is so full of tears, and the only tears to dread are those that cannot be shed."

"Yet after all," she said, "the help is not in the tears, but in the life-blood from the print of the nails."

But after that she did not try to hide the tears from him. In every town where Ethne and Baithene had found succour, it was the joy of Marius to leave rich offerings for the poor. At Tours they found out the old monk, St. Martin's friend, and left their gifts with him, and laid their babe in his arms for his benediction. At Orleans, dear and sacred for so many reasons to them, they made their offerings at the tomb of Anianus (St. Aignan), the noble old Bishop who had so effectually defended the city, and had gone to his reward and rest the year before.

It was in Troyes that Ethne first began to rise again to her old hopefulness. For there they found the aged "Pope" and "Father," Bishop Lupus, restored to his repentant children; the whole city gathered again in honour and reverent love around the shepherd who had, as they found and acknowledged at last, been willing to lay down his life for the sheep.

"*The people smote on their breasts and returned*," Ethne said; and she was comforted, for the Church and the world; for the multitudes, the toiling, sick, bewildered multitudes, straying and fainting, were always closest to that royal, motherly, Christ-like heart. Nor did they forget to visit the lowly tomb of the Deacon Nemorius, who was slain with the Book of the Gospels on his breast, before Lupus met and conquered Attila. Beside him lay other nameless martyrs similarly slain. And Ethne said—

"Perhaps the noblest, after all, are among these; and glorious it is to think that these, the nameless on earth, are the numberless in heaven."

One night they paused on their way to Troyes at a village in a little island in the middle of the river Seine, to have a sight of the noble maiden Genofeva (St. Geneviève), and the place which was said to owe its salvation from the Huns to her courage and her prayers. She had been a disciple of Bishop Germanus of Auxerre. On one of his missions through Gaul she had come to him, desiring to consecrate her maiden life to Christ, and he had picked up a common coin from the ground as a token and badge for her to wear. Afterwards, when the Huns were hovering round the neighbourhood, all the inhabitants would have fled and abandoned the place, but the maiden Genofeva exhorted them not to flee from the Huns into the homeless world, but to flee to God in their true home, the church. Night and day, she and the few who shared her faith stayed in the little church and prayed that God would help them. And the Huns did spare the place, and that little village grew to be Paris; and the maiden's name

was honoured on earth long after she had found her home with God for ever.

When they went southward from Troyes they had a hospitable welcome from Marius' old friend, Sidonius Apollinaris, soon about to relinquish his worldly dignities, and to devote himself to the arduous life of a Bishop of Auvergne. His gracious kindliness touched Ethne, and she was little disturbed by his antique pomp of words and elaborate little plays of decorative wit. They seemed to her the recreation of an old man, belonging to an old and fading world, and she had a tenderness for both which won his heart. He regarded her as a nymph of the fountains, and she scarcely escaped being celebrated in an imitative classical panegyric.

In the villa of the religious layman near Arles, to whom Marius had paid a visit years before, they stayed a night, and heard again of the venerated Metropolitan Hilary, and of the resentment felt against Leo of Rome for his severe treatment of him. This controversy Ethne was not advanced enough to understand, so that, when Marius turned uneasily to her for consolation and explanation about Leo, she only said—

"You know I cannot understand your politics in Church or Empire; they are too difficult for me. My world is too young. It seems to me so much like the old disputes among the disciples which should be the greatest. We know Leo never wants to be greatest for himself. If he wants it for his city and his Church, I suppose it is because he thinks it best for all the rest. These tribes you call barbarian seem to change and migrate about so much, whilst your Rome seems to stay; and in their languages there seem so many different dialects, it is difficult to know whether they are languages at all, or only words put together from many languages, as a means of communication between travellers meeting for a few days by the way; whilst your Latin is always there, and always the same, and is the key to everything one wants to learn."

And Marius took comfort, and replied—

"I suppose, as Lucia said, we have to live our lives *here* and *now*, and must build the best we can for our here and now. And Christ, Who never leaves His flock, will decide, as the ages go on, what part of the building is only ours, and has to pass away, and what is His to endure for ever."

But with Salvian, the venerable presbyter at Marseilles, whom Marius had so reverenced of old, "Magister Episcoporum," teacher of bishops, though never himself more than a presbyter, Ethne felt at home at once. His dark views of the Church and the world did not at all depress her.

"It is as good as living in the house or tent of the old chieftain Job," she said, "to be here. Of course we know the world is not right, nor, it seems, even the Church here on earth. And yet it is better than being with Job, because the venerable Salvian knows the Gospels, and is always sure of the victory of good."

"He sees how the battle is *lost*," Marius said, "and that is a great part of the lesson how it is to be won. 'Our own vices are killing us,' Salvian says; and there is always hope if we can learn that the fault is our own."

They returned from Gaul by the eastern coast of Italy. Marius had a desire to show Ethne where the city of Aquileia *had been*. The Roman roads along the Adriatic, which had led to the ruined cities of Altinum, Concordia, and Aquileia, still remained, though the cities to which they led had vanished for ever, under the devastations of the Huns. They stood among the charred ruins of Aquileia by the clear stream of the Natiso; and from the abandoned quays of the great commercial port they chartered a vessel from Ravenna to take them thither by the coast. As they sailed along the low shores, they saw a few poor huts on a cluster of islands, with shallow channels between, peopled by fugitives from the ruined cities. They knew not that this cluster of huts would grow into Venice, any more than they could foresee the fiery flood of Moslem invasion from Arabia which Venice was to help to stem. But as they landed and spent a few hours among the refugees in those huts, and listened to their tales of wrong and ruin, and saw their brave battle of resistance with the seas and sands, Ethne, always in sympathy with suffering and toil, felt there a breath of life and hope which she missed afterwards amidst the empty pomp of Imperial Ravenna.

CHAPTER XXVI.
"THE HOLD OF EVERY FOUL SPIRIT," "I SIT A QUEEN."

t was in the glow of an autumn evening that Ethne and Marius, with their little Paul, the Irish nurse, Dewi and the dog, reached the Aventine, in the autumn of the year of our Lord 454.

The welcome of Damaris and Fabricius, especially the mother's wistful welcome, with an instinctive longing look for some one yet to come who was not there, brought to Ethne's heart again the warmth of familiar affection and the sense of home. If Damaris had seemed satisfied, as if all were restored by her own return with Marius, Ethne's own heart would have been less satisfied. It was the mother's first eager question, "And Lucia, my daughter, my child?" that altogether woke up her heart to life. Her own mother's heart, Ethne knew, was always asking that question about herself, and in filling as far as possible a daughter's place to Damaris, she felt as if in some way strengthening Lucia to sustain her own mother in Ireland.

One day before long she met Miriam, straying sadly into the Temple of Peace.

"You wonder to see a Hebrew woman in this Temple of the Idol," she said; "but I came to see once more the sacred treasures of our race, and of the Temple of our God, the golden table of the shewbread, the seven-branched candlestick, that once lit up our Holy Place."

"Your Holiest Place was dark and empty, was it not, all the year?" asked Ethne; and then very tenderly she added, "But I believe if you and I could look into the Holy of Holies now in the heavens, we should see it not dark or empty; for One of your race has entered there and abides there always."

"Ah, lady! ah, my child!" said Miriam, passionately, "pray thou for the husband of my youth, if thou canst indeed pray to One Who sees and hears; pray for him, that the glamour and enchantment may pass away. The clutch of Mammon is around him closer and closer, crushing out his heart, his life, entwined so fearfully with what is dearest and best, his love for our child. He seems only to care for one thing besides—these sacred relics of our ancient glory. He also steals in here from time to time, and I have seen the tears on his wrinkled old face, making it look for the moment young again, as if the old days and the old life might come back yet."

The family stayed all that winter on the Aventine, and more and more Ethne's heart was drawn to Fabricius and Damaris, with a deep and tender reverence for the old age which seemed creeping on them too soon, as if the dissolution and decay of the falling world around them were gathering them into its shadow.

For this corrupt city, this Rome, over which Augustine had mourned, after the siege of Alaric, forty years before, as the fallen Babylon, had fallen deeper than ever, had indeed become "a habitation of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean bird, with her merchandise of bodies and souls of men." Again and again "her sins had reached unto heaven," and God had remembered her iniquities; but she, as her faithful Leo had told her again and again, remembered not her sins, nor her chastenings, nor her deliverances, but still said in her heart, "I sit a Queen, and shall see no sorrow."

Even as they had entered the streets on their return from Ireland, full of the din of wild revelry, Ethne's nurse had said—"Is this the city which has been plundered and burnt so often, which we heard was saved so lately from destruction by the prayers of the great Bishop?" And Ethne could only say, "God did save the city once more through Leo—once more!" knowing what depths of misery and iniquity lay seething underneath all this foam and noise.

The Imperial court had for a time transferred itself from Ravenna to the Palatine, and seemed to have grown more wicked than ever, with the base wickedness of weakness, deeming itself emancipated from fear. Attila, the dread of Europe, Roman and Gothic, Imperial and barbarian, was dead. The Huns were scattered into a helpless herd of disconnected tribes. Ercan, Attila's darling boy, was tranquilly and meekly reigning over a little portion of his father's conquests, under the protection of the Eastern Empire, in the country around the mouth of the Danube. There was nothing more to fear from the Huns. It was true that their ancient allies, the Vandals, who had slaughtered more Romans than any other of the barbarians, had taken possession of the province of North Africa. But the Vandals would, it was hoped, be content with Africa; and although they were becoming skilful seamen, with great fleets like Carthage of old, and although they had a powerful king, Genseric, of a most savage temper, who might, some thought, prove another Hannibal to Rome, Africa was across the sea and a long way off, and the worst evil inflicted on Rome at present by the Vandal conquests, was the loss of the great granary of her hungry population.

It was also true that the Vandals were Arians, and hated the Romans, not merely as Romans, but as Catholics. The stories of persecution from Vandal Africa were very fearful; but the stories of the iniquities of Roman Carthage before the Vandals captured it had been more fearful still.

Augustine had died twenty-five years before, at besieged Hippo, repeating the penitential psalms and weeping for his people, yet saying —"Righteous art Thou, O Lord, and Thy judgment is just."

Augustine's Hippo had fallen, Carthage had fallen, and had been sacked by the Vandals, experts, it was said, in plundering beyond all the barbarians; and with the greed of plunder was blended the cruelty of persecution. Nobles and ladies of gentle birth were sold in the slave-market; priests were slain in the churches as they read the Gospels and celebrated the Eucharist. Tortures unutterable were inflicted on the obstinate. And all the time the piratical raids were drawing nearer and nearer to Rome; yet Valentinian and his court went on revelling in careless indifference, disregarding every tie of honour and justice, betraying hospitality, dishonouring the noblest blood, rewarding with treachery the most faithful service. The great General Aetius was there at the court, his son betrothed to the Emperor's daughter; but the Emperor had begun to feel Aetius no longer necessary, and his doom was sealed.

At length the story of crime reached its climax. The Emperor invited the great general who had saved his empire into his palace; and then, professing to be indignant with him at urging too vehemently his son's suit for his Imperial bride, suddenly plunged his sword into the heart of his

guest and deliverer; the only occasion, it was bitterly said, on which he had the courage to use a sword. The wretched courtiers followed his example; Aetius fell, pierced and mangled with many wounds. His friends were then allured into the palace, and murdered in cold blood one by one. The courtly Sidonius Apollinaris was startled from his smooth Latinity into the vigour of old Roman speech by his indignation at this crime, and called the miserable Emperor a "crazy half-man," scarcely possessing an individual name, a mere appanage to his mother Placidia. *Aetium Placidus mactavit semivir amens.* And it was reported that when, immediately after the murder, the Imperial murderer, probably doubting the prudence of his act, asked one of his courtiers if it was a good deed, he was answered with an epigram which made its author famous—"Whether it was a good deed, most noble Emperor, or something quite other than a good deed, I am scarcely able to say. One thing, however, I do know, that you have cut off your right hand with your left!"

The feeble Emperor had not long to wait to prove whether his crime was a political success. Christmas came once more to Rome, with its message of peace; Epiphany, the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, with its boundless revelation of love, its boundless promise of redemption; and Leo's noble voice rang through the great Christian basilica its trumpet-peals of victory, of warning, of summons to holy life, its sentences of just judgment on the unjust. And in March that sentence fell on Valentinian. He was riding out of the city to the Campus Martius, and halting amongst some laurel bushes in a pleasant grove, surrounded by his court and his guards, watching the games of the athletes, when suddenly two soldiers of the guard (whose names Optila and Traustila have a Gothic flavour) rushed upon him and stabbed him to death; and beside him also the minister Chrysaphius, who with him had planned the death of Aetius. No other blood was shed. In all that servile court, inall that dissolute city, no hand was raised to avenge the death of the Imperial murderer.

After that events rushed rapidly after each other, as at the close of some sensational melodrama. Petronius Maximus of the great Anician house was elected Emperor in place of Valentinian. The placid, virtuous senator, a man of the latest culture, who regulated his days by his clypsedra, or water-clock, whose exceptionally magnificent and exceptionally respectable festivities were the admiration of respectable Rome, was installed in the Imperial palace. His own wife had died—many said broken-hearted—from the wrongs of Valentinian; and there were suspicions that Petronius Maximus was an accomplice in the murder of his wife's betrayer. Whether from the doting affection of an old man, or the base vengeance of an injured man on an innocent woman, Petronius Maximus, very shortly after the Emperor's death, insisted on the beautiful widowed Empress Eudoxia becoming his wife. Eudoxia, a niece of the great Emperor Theodosius, had loved her worthless husband in spite of his crimes, and naturally detested Petronius Maximus. In the madness of her humiliation and revenge, she sent an appeal to Genseric to come with his Vandals and deliver her by attacking Rome.

Genseric's pirate fleet was always ready for any expedition of plunder, most ready for the most profitable, most of all ready to combine vengeance and gain in the plunder of the queen-city of the world, the metropolitan see of Catholic Christendom.

It was soon rumoured that his ships were on their way across the Mediterranean. But Petronius Maximus sat helpless in his palace beside the Imperial wife who detested him. He could think of no remedy but to issue the Imperial proclamation—"The Emperor grants to all who desire it liberty to depart from the city."

Fabricius, unable to defend his family, sent Damaris and Ethne with the child and an escort of faithful slaves to the villa among the Sabine hills, whilst he and Marius resolutely remained, to be of what service they could to Rome.

Ethne and Damaris were alone together in the familiar rooms of the quiet home among the streams of the wooded hills, when the tidings of the tragic end of Maximus reached them. When it was quite sure that the Vandals were on the sea, on their way to Rome, the citizens went mad with terror and despair, and seized on the wretched old enthroned official, as the nearest object on which to wreak their rage. He had perhaps been harsh as well as weak; to be just requires courage as well as good-nature. But whatever he had been, it was through him, as the cause of the appeal of the Empress, insulted by her unwilling nuptials, that the Vandals were coming. The nobles, and all who could take refuge in flight, fled. The panic was universal. The cause of it, a feeble doting old man, was at hand. The soldiers mutinied, the rabble rose, the slaves of the Imperial household, probably clinging to the young Empress of the ancient Imperial house, whose vices had only made the more revelry for them, and detesting the intruder, whose respectable virtues brought them no profit, abandoned the old man to the rioters. The smooth, orderly life ended in a ghastly tragedy. The Imperial household tore him limb from limb, dragged the fragments of the mangled body through the city, and then threw them into the Tiber, that no reparation of Christian rites of burial might be his. And the messenger who brought the terrible tidings to Damaris and Ethne added—"And the Vandals are here; their ships have been seen in the offing close to the port of Ostia."

CHAPTER XXVII.
LEO AND THE VANDALS.

or three days no news from Rome reached the villa on the Sabine hills. To Damaris and Ethne they were days of solitude spent in prayer for their beloved and for Rome. They prayed the "Our Father," the great prayer of Christendom, over and over, engraving the unfathomable meanings of its simplicity deeper and deeper into their hearts. And "after that manner they prayed always," every petition pervaded by the "Our Father." And so the childlike asking for the daily bread and daily forgiveness became possible and real; the solitude of the prayer to "*My Father Who seeth in secret*" ordained in the Divine ritual, expanded into Our Father's all-embracing heaven, into the boundlessness of the One Family, into the*Our* of the most solitary Christian prayer. Also, they prayed the collects of Leo, humble, grand, and simple, the "Grant us the spirit to think and do always such things as be rightful;" the prayer to the Pilot of the Church and of each faithful soul, sure to be at the helm through every storm—"Grant that the course of this world may be so peacefully ordered by Thy governance, that Thy Church may serve Thee in all godly quietness."

These especially for this earth, and then looking beyond to the results in heaven—"Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises, through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord."

And perhaps oftenest of all they offered up that prayer of Leo's which, intertwining commands and promises, unfolds the depths of both command and promise for earth and heaven—"Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain that which Thou dost promise, make us to love that which Thou dost command."

Thus, often resting their hearts on the staff of Leo's faithful words, the two women lived through those days of terrible suspense. And on the fourth came the good tidings, that once more, as far as possible, Leo had saved Rome. The messenger told how the peaceful procession of the clergy, the great Bishop leading them, had gone forth from the gates of the defenceless city, along the Ostian Way, and had met the Vandal king.

Less merciful than the Huns, Genseric had yet been moved as never before by that stately, saintly presence, and although he would not relinquish the plunder of the city, he gave orders to his soldiers that there should be no torture of the captives, no slaughter of the unresisting, nor any setting of the buildings on fire.

Marius and Fabricius were still determined that they must not leave as long as they had any chance of helping the miserable, plundered citizens, or were able in any way to mediate, counsel, or sustain.

Ethne could scarcely wish them to do otherwise, and the anguish of suspense had to be borne. It was reported that the nobles were to be taken captive, and sold into slavery in Africa; and who could say that Marius and Fabricius would escape?

A necessity for fresh air and movement came over Ethne; child of the hills and woods, for her the companionship of the mountains and the streams was as that of familiar friends. At first she hesitated to leave Damaris alone, until persuaded by her entreaties.

"Go forth, my daughter," she said, "among the hills and brooks; thine eyes are always opened to see the well-springs, as thou liftest up the thirsting."

And Ethne went, usually accompanied by the two people of her own race in the household, Nurse Fedelm and Dewi, and by the great deer-hound. The first day she sought and found no companionship save the streams and the rivers rushing down the crags; the very sound of the water seemed to refresh her like a draught from the cup of life. But the next day she ventured to the ruins of Nero's villa, to the place whence they had seen the pagan temple crowning the heights and the rude cross of torture planted on the little hill.

It was evening again, as when she went there before with her husband. The temple shone golden in the evening glow, and the cross was reddened with the rays of the dying sun. Ethne was half hoping to see the hermit again once more, when to her delight she perceived the kneeling form in the dark robe with the sheepskin capote, the arms clasped around the cross. She went forward and knelt beside him, whilst Fedelm and Dewi stood at some distance behind. After a time the hermit rose. His face lit up as he recognized Ethne.

"But where is thy husband, my daughter?" he asked.

"In Rome, father!" she said.

"But they say those savages, the Arian Vandals, are plundering and sacking Rome, my child, and that the city lies a defenceless prey in their hands."

"He stays because Rome *is* defenceless. Pray for him!" she implored.

"I will pray for him night and day," was the reply.

"You are a priest?" she said.

"A deacon and servant of Christ and His Christians, as far as may be," he replied. "Bishop Leo wrote to the Bishops of Campagna, that the priesthood should not be degraded by the ordination of slaves, and I, as thou knowest, was a slave and a fugitive."

"Bishop Leo has once more saved Rome," Ethne said, "as far as Rome can be saved."

"I know," the hermit said; "I pray for the Bishop constantly, often in his own words. It is not because he despises the slave, but because he honours the ministry of the Lord, that he refuses a slave the priesthood. For, alas! often slavery does degrade the slave unutterably; and also," he added, in a low, deep voice, "the master."

"Our Master took the form of a slave," she said, "and He knows the heart of a slave. I also, father, was once a captive and in bondage. I think

nothing teaches like suffering; and that kind of suffering I suppose Leo does not know."

The hermit was silent a few moments, and then once more, as on that other evening, looking up at the rude weather-beaten cross, he said, with tears in his eyes—

"*Lady, thou hast understood.*" Then, seeing her worn, wearied look, he added, "Wilt thou come with thy people into my cave? I have bread and raisins, if thou wilt deign to partake of them; the peasants around are good to me and bring me food; and close beside is a spring of pure water."

She went with him. An abundant fountain gushed out of the rock just outside the cave, afterwards plashing in a waterfall over the rocks.

"It is one of the springs which feed the Aqua Claudia," he said.

She smiled.

"Then it has baptized my little Paul," she said. "Thou hast sent forth thy contribution to the sacred font of the Lateran."

"Thou hast a little Paul?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, "a little Paul, who is, I trust, to tread in the steps of the great Paul, who wrote the letter about the fugitive slave, 'his own son in the faith, his brother beloved.'"

His voice quivered as he replied—

"I shall pray every evening and morning for that little Paul."

"As we pray night and morning for the slaves," she said, "that they may be gathered into the Church as brothers beloved by Christ and by us."

Then he told her that his cave was supposed to be a haunted cave.

"The peasants think it is the oracle of a faun," he said, "one of their old forest gods. And still sometimes they come to consult the old deities here. They seek to know the future, if perchance there is any escape for them out of their miseries, which are many. They think they are seeking the old dethroned gods whom their fathers worshipped, in what they think were happier times. But their poor hearts are really thirsting, not for the dead heroes, but for the living God; not for the unhuman fauns, but for the human Saviour. And often they will listen to me when I speak to them of the Christ Who died and is not dead. And I tell them His words, 'Come unto Me, all that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.' And they, being often wearied sore, and overladen, come, and coming, they find rest, for they find Him."

"I also came here to-day weary and heavy-laden," she said, "and I go away comforted and at rest."

"Thou hast not only come to Him, my daughter," he said, "but thou hast taken His yoke upon thee, which is 'not my will but Thine!' His yoke," he added, "is not indeed always easy, but it is always good. It is the yoke of the plough which shall make thy fields fruitful; the yoke of the water-carrier who brings refreshment wherever he goes. His burdens are not always light, as we understand lightness; but they are burdens which do not hinder, but help. They make the feet 'swifter,' not slower, on His ways."

He spoke with a Greek accent that reminded her of Damaris.

"Thou, like myself, art not of this land," she said.

"I was from Athens," he replied. "My mother-tongue was the language in which the great Paul wrote."

"Thou speakest the words of the gospels as in a mother-tongue," she said. "From thy lips they seem to drop into my heart fresh from the fountain, with no aqueduct between."

And as she rose to go away, he said—

"I shall pray constantly for thy little Paul, and for thy husband, and for thee."

When she returned, Damaris rejoiced at the light in her face.

"Thou hast been among thy fountains!" she said with a smile.

"I have been among *thy* fountains," Ethne replied. "I have had water given me to drink from the fountain of thy mother-tongue."

Another day Ethne resolved to visit once more the farm among the hills, where she had seen the ruddy, happy children, the free, frank, soldierly man with the graceful, dark-eyed young wife, whose face seemed to her familiar, as a strain of music heard long ago. She found the young mother drawing water with a pitcher from the well near the house, her children laughing around her, and helping her to pour the water into a trough for the sheep which were clustering near. Her dark eyes brightened in kindly recognition, and all at once the likeness in her face flashed upon Ethne.

"Rachel!" she exclaimed, "Rachel at the well!"

"Rachel is my name," the stranger said; "but how couldst thou know me?"

"I did not know thee," Ethne said, "but I knew thy mother, Miriam, the wife of Eleazar."

The young mother laid her pitcher on the brim of the well, and knelt down by its side, and clasping her hands in adoration, she looked up to heaven.

"God of our fathers—Father of our Christ," she said, "Thou hast heard me at last."

"He has heard thee all the time," said Ethne, "thee, and thy father and mother, who have sought thee from land to land, and prayed for thee day and night."

"Where are they?" Rachel asked.

"Alas! they are in wretched, captive, plundered Rome," Ethne said; "but pray on. The God of thy fathers, the Father of thy Christ and ours, is hearing still."

Rachel insisted on Ethne's coming into the cottage with the nurse and Dewi and the dog, and nothing could satisfy her till they had all partaken of her goat's-milk cheeses, and the flat, Oriental loaves which she baked on the wood fire.

As they were eating, the soldierly husband came in from the fields, and then all their story unfolded itself.

There had been a rising of the people in the city in Asia Minor where Rachel was born, in consequence of some wild calumny about the massacre of a Christian child, and a Roman force had come to restore order. All the Jews in the place had been banished, and some of them had been sold into captivity. Among the captives, Rachel, then a child of twelve, had fallen to the share of a Roman centurion, a brave, simple man, whose mother was of Gothic race.

“He had compassion on me,” Rachel said; “he is the gentlest and bravest of men. He had a little sister about my age. He brought me home to his father’s house and lands among these hills. They were Christians, and welcomed me as one of the people of their Christ, and I also became a Christian, and was baptized. In a few years I became the wife of their son, my deliverer.”

Then Ethne told her all she knew of Miriam and Eleazar; and with the promise that Rachel would come to see her in her own home, she returned to Damaris and her little Paul.

CHAPTER XXVIII.
A TREASURE LOST AND A SOUL FOUND.

joyful meeting awaited Ethne on her return. Marius himself came to greet her, with their little Paul in his arms.

Fabricius and Damaris were sitting together in the corridor.

After the first rapture of re-union was over, Ethne's eyes, always quick to perceive any suffering creature, caught sight of the crouching figure of an aged man, propped up against one of the pillars of the house, and of a woman bending over him.

In another moment she recognized that the poor, feeble, bent form was that of Eleazar, with his wife beside him. She went to them at once. Miriam looked up into her face with anguish in her eyes; but in Eleazar's face there was no sign of recognition. On his wrists were the scars and cuts of tightly-strained cords. He looked at Ethne with a piteous appeal, but no comprehension.

"All gone!" he kept muttering to himself; "all! all! All the treasure! all the treasure I had heaped up for my Rachel! All the treasure the Almighty had preserved so long for my people, and caused the Gentiles to preserve. The golden table, the golden seven-branched candlestick of the Temple, all are gone! We are forsaken! We are trampled into the dust for ever! There is none to care and none to save!"

Fabricius and Marius had but just arrived with the helpless old man. After a time they led him gently away into a chamber apart with his wife, laid him on a couch, set fruit and bread before them, and left them alone.

Ethne did not yet venture to tell them of Rachel. She saw that the old man could not bear any fresh shock, even a shock of joy; and besides, she felt she must first see Miriam alone and give her the tidings.

When she came back into the corridor, she and Damaris listened to the story of the terrible fortnight of the separation. For fourteen days the luxurious city had been given up to the plunder of the most practised and cruel plunderers in the world; Rome had been abandoned to her bitterest enemies.

The palaces, many of them like cities in themselves, each with its amphitheatre, its stadium, its baths, its garrison of slaves, had been rifled of every treasure they contained. Gold, gems, rich silks, costly furniture and raiment, embroideries, tapestries, carpets from every land under the sun; priceless sculptures and paintings, bronzes, marbles, jewelled cups and urns, choice graven work in brass and copper, everything was gone. The temples of the old gods were emptied at last. The statues were taken from all the ancient shrines, and the Temple of Peace was robbed of the sacred plunder found in the Temple of Jerusalem, and sculptured in bas-relief on the Arch of Titus. The pagan statues and the Jewish sacred treasures were placed in two of the Vandal ships, which had different fates. The sacred things of the Jewish temple reached Carthage in safety, but the ship which was laden with the old Roman gods and goddesses foundered and sank, and thus for centuries the beautiful old statues have been lying under the blue waves of the Mediterranean.

But far worse than this, the Vandal fleet had borne away into slavery hundreds of the noblest in Rome—men and matrons, youths and maidens.

"How did you escape?" Ethne and Damaris asked.

"We scarcely know," Marius said, "unless it was because you were praying, and we were needed here."

"But they said Leo had saved Rome for the second time," Ethne said. "How can it be said that Rome is saved?"

"Rome is still *there*," Marius replied mournfully, remembering vanished Aquileia, "despoiled indeed, but not destroyed; still a home of the living, still a city, not a heap of ashes and a charnel-house of the dead. And this she owes to Leo. As to us, our lives at least are saved; and if life is still worth anything to him, we have saved the poor old Jew and his noble wife. For he *is* poor, without pretence, at last, and she *is* noble."

"How did you save him? and what from?" Ethne asked.

"His precious hoard was all but his death," Marius replied; "those ferrets of Vandals wrung out of him where it was hidden. I found him hung up by the wrists in his own upper chamber, the ropes cutting through to his poor old bones; they were threatening other tortures, and his wife was kneeling vainly imploring them to have pity on his grey hairs. At that moment, hearing cries of distress, I happened to come in, and I reminded the brigands of the promise made by their king Genseric to Leo, not to torture their captives or to slaughter the unresisting. 'But this old fellow is not unresisting,' they said; 'he refuses to show us the hoards we know he has here, close at hand.' 'What hoards can a hunted, persecuted old exile like me have?' moaned the Jew. The Vandals laughed, and strained the cords tighter. The old man writhed, but would not give any information as to the coveted hoard. If it had been a sacred trust he was defending he would have been a hero; if a religious faith, a martyr.

"Then Miriam, unable to bear any longer seeing him thus tortured, whispered to me, and pointed to a corner of the room, where the hoard had been built in. The old man's eyes flashed fire, and he denied what she said; but the plunderers knocked at the wall, found that it rang hollow, broke into it, and greeted the shower of gold and silver that rattled down on the floor with peals of mocking laughter. Again I reminded them of the promise of mercy to Leo. The chief agreed.

"'All fair, the secret is out,' he said. 'We have the treasure, and that is torture enough for the old miser.' And at his command they cut the cords and let the victim down.

"He fell in a helpless heap on the floor, all hope and courage crushed out of him, and wept and sobbed like a child. If it had been wife and child for whom he had suffered any one must have wept with him."

"It *was* wife and child and country to him," Ethne murmured; "it was the double glamour which bewildered him—the hideous curse of Mammon and the fond dream of affection. But what of Miriam?"

“She knelt down beside him,” Marius said, “the noble Jewish woman. She threw her arms around him and sustained him; she took his poor wounded hands and held them to her heart; she sobbed out every tender name she could; I understood them by the tones, though the words were in their own Hebrew. There was tender reverence in her every gesture, even more than affection; and turning to me, she said, in a tone almost of triumph, ‘It is not himself, it is his deadliest enemy they have slain. And now he will be himself again.’ And she added, ‘Thy wife will understand!’”

“I do understand,” Ethne said, with a victorious radiance like a halo on her face; “and I have found him his true gold! I have found his child! The idol is broken, but the dream of love shall prove true.”

The next morning she crept quietly into the chamber where they had left Eleazar and Miriam. The old man had fallen at last into a heavy sleep. Miriam was sitting on the floor beside him, holding one of his hands. Ethne sat down beside her, and for some minutes said nothing.

“The evil spirit has gone out of him,” Miriam said. “You see, he sleeps as sweetly as a child.”

“And the lost child is coming to him,” Ethne answered. “Coming to you both, mother and father! Your Rachel is found.”

Miriam started as if she had seen a spirit, fixing her dark eyes with passionate intensity on the sweet grey eyes of Ethne. Her whole frame quivered.

“Lady! child!” she said. “To thee, I know, it would be impossible to lie, even in the fond hope of binding up a broken heart. You would always know that nothing but truth could heal the wounded spirit, or bind up the broken heart. Nothing but the love which is true—nothing but God.”

“Nothing but God, Who is Truth and Love,” Ethne said, with her infectious smile; “Who has heard thy prayers and seen thy tears all through these weary years; Who gave thee compassion which made thee good as an angel to me. He has led me to thy child.”

And then she told Miriam the story of Rachel.

As early as possible on the morrow Ethne and Marius went to the farm on the mountains, and there they found Rachel amongst her children; the dark-eyed boys, and one fair, golden-haired baby girl. Father, mother, and children at once came down the hills to the villa of Fabricius. There, by many tokens, the mother recognized her child, whilst by an instinctive sympathy their hearts drew together.

When Eleazar awoke, the little group around him, Rachel and her sons, and the golden-haired babe on Miriam the grandmother’s knee, were beside him.

“Who are these?” he said, starting up, with eyes wide open and bewildered, yet with a dawning consciousness in them, like one waking out of a dream.

“It is only thy Rachel, our Rachel, and her children,” Miriam said, in tender, quiet tones, caressing the little one on her knee. “Thou hast always known they would come, and now, see, they are here!”

“Is it Paradise?” he said. “Are we in the garden of God?”

“Nay, beloved,” Miriam replied, very quietly, “except as every true marriage brings us back to Eden.”

Then he began gradually to return to full, quiet consciousness, and rising on the couch, he said—

“My Rachel! And all the dowry, all the treasure I had saved for thee is gone.” Then burying his face in his hands, the old man wept, quiet, natural tears.

But his daughter knelt beside him, and gently drawing down his hands, laid her babe in his arms.

“Father,” she said, “see, the God of our fathers has given us the gift and inheritance that cometh of the Lord.”

And her husband, standing behind her, laid his hand on her head and said—

“See, here is thy hid treasure. Truly thou hast given the best jewel in the world to me.”

“What to us were gold and silver?” Rachel pleaded. “God has given us the babes, and also the old riches of our race, the riches of Abraham our father. We are rich in flocks and herds. Wilt thou not come and see?”

And the old man laid his trembling hands on her head, and said—

“The Lord hath taken away, and the Lord hath given; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

CHAPTER XXIX.
ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS.

istory is a great perpetrator of anachronisms. She is

> “débordante, frénétique,
> Inconvenante; ici le nain, là le géant,
> Tout à la fois.”

But

> “Il faut bien tolérer quelques excès de
> verve
> Chez un si grand poète.”[8]

All ages in one; all types tossed together *pêle-mêle*; repetitions, contradictions, violent contrasts, inexplicable inconsistencies no novelist would have dared to invent.

Even in our little group among the Sabine hills, how many races, periods, types were thrown together! In Fabricius, not a lifeless fossil, but a living survival of the grand old Rome of law and order and self-sacrificing patriotism, the traces of which had made it possible for the corrupt new Rome to linger on so long. In Damaris, not the painted artificial Hellenism of her present surroundings, but a genuine afterglow of the noble, simple beauty of early Greece, beauty as natural and inevitable as the beauty of the lines and curves of flowers and waves. In Miriam, the fervent, adoring, exulting, thirsting love for the God of the fathers of the old Hebrew Psalmists; the boundless, helpful pity for men of the old Hebrew prophets. In Eleazar, the old exclusive, passionate patriotism of his people, which in the isolation of exile had so long only seemed to survive in that passion for possession which the old prophets had so continually detected and so unsparingly denounced; and now that this icy spell was broken, the old passion of patriotism had revived in the passionate love of the family, always recognized by the Law and the Prophets as the sacred core of national life, the sacred shrine of what was most heart-stirring in the national Ritual. In the Greek hermit of the cave, a survival of the early Greek Church of the Roman catacombs; and also an outpost of the great army of monks and solitaries, which was to conquer the wildernesses, material and moral, of Western Christendom. In Marius, sunset melting into dawn through his Ethne; his weariness of the faded classicism of an imitative culture, and the unreality of subtle debates about a faith which had no bearing on practice, vanishing in the freshness of her new heavenly life; all that was true and beautiful in the fading old world living anew for him in the morning dew of her new day.

Soon after the Vandals had sailed off for Africa, Fabricius and Marius went again to Rome to look after the desolated palace on the Aventine. The walls were still there, but little else.

The Vandals, said to be the greatest experts at plunder among the barbarians, had done their work effectually. Traces of barbaric feasts were strewn about the deserted rooms; fragments of familiar household treasures, cherished from childhood, were scattered over the broken mosaic pavements as mere refuse of useless and abandoned plunder; the frescoed walls were stained and scarred. In the gardens the thickets of roses were trampled and crushed, the trellised vines torn down and broken. There was a sense of outrage and desecration over all, which for the time made the dear familiar things and places terrible and weird and ghastly. They had to say to themselves again and again—“These trampled flowers, and prostrate vines, and despoiled halls and chambers do not *feel* their dishonour. And ere long for us also the vulgar associations scrawled over them will be obliterated, and the earlier characters will reappear.”

And Marius said—

“Ethne would see through it all at once. Being a creature of the light, naturally she always looks through to the light, and therefore can always read all the palimpsests, and see through to all the original sacred texts, in Attila, in old Eleazar, or in our Rome.”

Fabricius made some worldly lamentations over the destruction of property for his children.

“I thought to have endowed thee and thy children richly,” he said, “as becomes our ancient house. But between the Vandals and the Huns, and our own tax-gatherers, the beggary of the citizens, and the robberies of the slaves, there will, I fear, be little left for thee and thine to inherit.”

“We inherit *you*,” Marius said; “thee and all thou art, our mother and all she is. And what inheritance can be worth that to us? What do rich men often leave to their heirs, but the inheritance not of their gold but of their avarice, the inheritance of a paralyzed hand unable to use or to give, but only to close on what it has; the curse of an insatiable hunger for more; the spell of a heap of gold which they have to toil to heap up higher, enchanted into beasts of burden or mere blind earthworms?”

“And yet,” said Fabricius, “they say the earthworms help to build and shape the world. But, however that may be, it is a good thing to see the spell reversed, as in Eleazar the Jew, transformed back from an earthworm into a man; the gold gone, the enchantment broken, and the man himself again. God keep us from all such enchantments.”

“It seems,” said Marius, “that in these days of sieges and sacks there is a good chance of the spells being broken. Perhaps if days of prosperity and peace ever come again, they may bring back baser idols and more unconquerable spells.”

When they returned to the Sabine hills they found all in full festival: the corridors of the villa festooned and garlanded with flowers and fruits, the labourers on the estate and the children of the mountain farm gathered for the joy of harvest; Eleazar, like one of the patriarchs of his race, with the “heritage and gift” of Rachel and her children clustered round him, Miriam with the last babe on her knee, Damaris guiding the first baby-steps of

little Paul, Rachel in her stately Oriental beauty, Ethne fair and radiant as morning serving every one.

While the children pelted or garlanded each other with the lavish wealth of roses, and filled the place with the music of their laughter, Fabricius drew near Eleazar, and the old men sat down together.

"The world is sad enough," Fabricius said, "for thy people and for mine; but the children are glad!"

And a soft voice near murmured—

"Their angels always behold the face of God."

"The God of our fathers gave us homes before He gave us a Temple and a priesthood," Eleazar said meditatively. "Perhaps He is leading us back to these earliest temples, where the father is the priest and the children are the singers."

"I have just heard a story which reads like a parable," Fabricius replied. "The ancient treasures of your Jerusalem and of our Rome have fallen alike into the hands of the Vandals; but their fate has been quite opposite. Yours have been borne safely to another shore; but ours lie lost for ever in the depths of the sea."

Ethne was standing near, and she knelt down and laid her gentle touch on the hand of Fabricius.

"Father," she said, "shall *anything* really good perish and be lost for ever in the depths of any sea? Does not your old Rome live on in her great laws, and in our own Leo? Are not all the real treasures carried on and translated into their true use and meaning in the Kingdom of our Christ?"

And Damaris, with little Paul in her arms, added—

"Surely all the true treasures of all the temples shall be saved, to be understood and used better by the babes who shall succeed us *here*; and," she concluded in a lower voice, "to be carried safely across the sea to the other shore, whither we are going, to the land of the living, to the City which hath the foundations."

The families of the Anician villa and the freehold farm on the mountains, the ancient inheritance of its possessors, dating back with a pedigree beyond the beginnings of Rome, were much linked together.

Through Miriam and Eleazar, Rachel and her children, the first Testament of God came to Ethne and her children, as a great national literature and history. Abraham in his tents with his flocks and herds; David, shepherd, hero, and king; Job, the great chieftain, who saw the dark side of the world and ventured to bewail it to God, and was not rejected by Him, but accepted and honoured; Moses, loving his rebellious people more than himself, and leading them through sea and desert; Daniel in the lions' den; the Three Children who chose the fire rather than falsehood, and walked through the fire unharmed beside One like the Son of God;—all these were living persons of a living story to Ethne's children. Dear, moreover, to Ethne with an intimate affection, besides these earthly friends, were the heavenly friends of the toiling and the suffering—the angel who came to the forsaken slave-woman, and called her by name, and led her back to her dying child, that God might open her eyes to see the "well," and the child might live; the angel who came to the despairing prophet, and brought him the little cake, when less sympathetic mortals might have inflicted on him a sermon on despondency. To her the voices of the old Hebrew prophets also, with the magnificent daring of their denunciations of oppression and wrong, came as fresh and inspiring as if she had heard them in the palaces on the Palatine but yesterday, or anywhere in the streets of Orleans and Troyes.

It was much thus to learn those unrivalled old human stories, those unique old Divine messages, not packed up in a lesson-book, nor crumbled down into texts, nor beaten thin into allegories, but real and fresh as the stories of Patrick or of Leo,—whilst always shining through and through with the Divine light, which those who most frankly recognize the human medium feel most vividly.

Delightful also it was to her beyond words, to see the light of the fulfilment of the New Testament of God, of the Christ, slowly penetrating into the soul of Eleazar, as it had into the heart of Miriam long before.

The New Testament, the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, epistolary treatises, familiar letters, came to Ethne's children from the lips of Damaris in the language of Paul and John, in living speech as familiar to Damaris as the words of Shakespeare and the great Elizabethans to us.

"Thy Jerome's Vulgate is as good and grand as our Claudian aqueduct," Ethne would say to Damaris; "but thy Greek is as the Fons Ceruleus, the Aqua Claudia, the fountains bursting fresh from the depths of these hills."

It was the last lingering sound of living Greek (the first language of the early Church) in the Western world. For centuries afterwards the living waters flowed to Western Christendom through Jerome's aqueduct. The great Leo did not write or speak Greek.

Many a time also Ethne found the old Greek hermit in his cave, near Monte Cassino, and laid her little Paul in his arms for his blessing. Once she told him of her dream after the birth of the child—of the church crowning the mountains in place of the temple of the old gods; of the company of mountain-folk, instead of leading the lambs garlanded for sacrifice, bringing their children for baptism; of the white-robed band pouring forth thence hither and thither throughout the mountains, throughout the world, like streams making the land fair and green wherever their footsteps came, like angels bringing to men the glad tidings of great joy. And the old man as he embraced the child said—

"And may this thy babe, lady, be one of those thy white-robed angels and messengers of peace."

One bright Sunday it happened that, as long before Lucia had discovered Ethne diving deep into the old Hebrew poem of Job, Marius found her greatly absorbed in a fresh manuscript. She was in ecstasies of delight.

"You never told me of this," she said. "This is a book of the Prophets of the New Testament of God. I shall never need to dream any more, for here is a Divine dream, a Vision of God! The disciple beloved of the Lord was in the Spirit on this His Lord's Day; saw Him; saw the riddle of this earth and its solution; saw heaven open from within; saw also the earth *as it is*, and was no more satisfied with it than the chieftain of old; saw how it is a battle-field to the end. But he also saw what the old chieftain could not see—that the victory is *sure*, has been won for ever, is being won day by day. Through all the din and wailing and tumult he heard the Hallelujahs of those in heaven who see the meaning and the end; felt the soft flow of the living fountains through all the blood and fire and smoke. On earth he saw the multitudes struggling, toiling, enslaved, oppressed, hungering and thirsting, and sick as of old in Galilee. In heaven he saw another great multitude innumerable, white-robed, with palms in their hands, yet longing and interceding for those who battle and suffer below. On earth, storm and battle to the end; but heaven shining through the rifts in the clouds all through to the end. And at last not only a 'multitude,' but the City, the City which hath the foundations coming down out of heaven from God. Earth also right at last!—not only the hunger and thirst, but the sins, the wrongs, and the curse and death itself gone for ever; His servants serving Him for ever, His

name shining in their foreheads,—*His name*, which that beloved disciple always tells us is *love*, the Lamb slain for love, the King conquering through love. You see there is no need to dream any more! All we could dream of, beautiful, and good, and holy, is unveiled here, and infinitely more than we could dream. The beloved disciple saw it—saw it for us all."

Before long another little son was given to Marius and Ethne, and she said—

"His name must be called John, after that beloved one who *saw*. I need no dream for him. We have the Divine dream and its interpretation, the riddle and the solution, the Book of the unveiling. We will go into the thick of the battle, thou and I and our children. We must not grudge them their share of the glorious wounds, or the hard victories. We must go back to the poor, plundered, wrecked city, to our Rome, for victory is sure if we endure to the end."

At Whitsuntide the family returned to the plundered palace on the Aventine. The pain at the despoiling of the palace was swallowed up in the threefold joy that Whitsuntide brought. In Constantine's baptistery, by the Church of St. John Lateran, in the porphyry font filled from the fountains on the Sabine hills, Ethne's second son was baptized by the name of the beloved disciple, the great Apostle of love, the Divine of the battles and the fountains.

And with this little John were received into the Church of Christ an aged man and woman of the race of which He was born—Miriam and Eleazar.

As in this great Whitsuntide baptism the large company of the newly-baptized were gathered together in their white baptismal robes, with the chrism on their foreheads, the voice of Leo rang through the silence in the vast spaces of the great basilica, and penetrated every heart, as he proclaimed—

"This day's solemnity, beloved, is to be accounted among our foremost festivals. For as to the Hebrew people of old, fifty days after the immolation of the paschal lamb, the law was given from Mount Sinai; so after the Passion of Christ, whereby the true Lamb of God was slain, on the fiftieth day after His Resurrection, the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles, and on the people of the faithful, so that the diligent Christian may recognize how the preparation (*initia*) of the Old Testament ministered to the beginnings (*principiis*) of the New, and the second was founded by the same Spirit who instituted the first."

As the great Bishop spake these words, Ethne's heart turned sympathetically to her Hebrew friends. And then came a bit especially for her own Ireland.

"Oh, how swift," Leo said, "is the speech of wisdom! And when God is the Teacher, how quickly what is taught is learned! The Spirit of Truth bloweth where He listeth. The peculiar (*propriæ*) voices of every nation are made one common tongue in the mouth of the Church. From this day the trumpet of evangelic preaching has pealed forth. From this day showers of gifts and rivers of blessing have watered every desert. The Spirit of God has been on the waters, renewing the face of the earth; and on the departing darkness flashes the new dawn, sparkling in the many colours of the various tongues, indwelling in each heart as a fiery force to consume sin, to create intelligent perception, to illumine every faculty. Let us with one heart incite one another to the veneration of this Holy Spirit, by Whom the whole Catholic Church is sanctified, by Whom every soul is imbued with reason, Who is the Inspirer of faith, the Teacher of science, the Fount of love, the Seal of chastity, the cause of all virtue. From Him is the calling on the Father, from Him are the tears of penitents, from Him the groans of suppliants; and 'none can call Jesus Lord except by Him.' For the Spirit of Truth Himself makes the house of His glory shine with the splendour of His own light, and in His temple He will suffer nothing dark nor anything lukewarm."

It was always Ethne's delight to bring Eleazar and Miriam to everything that linked the old with the new. She rejoiced therefore when, at the Festival of the Seven Maccabæan martyrs, Leo did honour to that noble mother of their race, the mother of the seven Maccabæan martyr brothers.

"Blessed mother! blessed progeny!" he said. "The palms of these seven martyrs are multiplied sevenfold—the first suffering without the help of an example; the last tortured in all the tortures of the others; whilst each conquers in all, all have won the sevenfold crown of each."

And then—"The battle indeed," he said, "never ceases for the Christian. Thou who dreamest that the days of persecution are past, that for thee there is no combat with the enemy, search into the recesses of thine own heart, and see if no tyrant seeks to rule in the citadel there. Make thou no truce with avarice; despise thou the increase of unjust gain; refuse thou any compact with pride; chase away enervating luxury; repel thou injustice; contend with falsehood. And when thou findest thy combats multiplied, do thou also, a follower of these martyrs, seek with them a multiplied victory. We die to sin when sins die in us; and men become dead to the world, not by the perishing of the senses, but by the death of vices. Let each of you be mindful that the Temple of God is founded in Himself."

Thus day by day and year by year Ethne and Marius, and all that little company of the Aventine, sought to keep their post in the great battle, contending in Rome against her tyrannies and miseries and sins, and making the plundered palace rich and beautiful again by gathering thither the orphans, the cripples, and the aged left destitute and forsaken by the sack of the Vandals; whilst among the Sabine hills they sought to bring freedom of soul to the slave, and the light of Christ to the lingering paganism of the peasants.

And all the time they were upheld by the holy example, and inspired by the trumpet-calls of Leo, rebuking the careless, encouraging the desponding, reviving the faint, enkindling the foremost to press on further.

Old Rome lived on, they felt, in Leo. His far-seeing eye reached from end to end of Christendom. His strong hand held the dissolving world and the distracted Church together.

His great life-battle was indeed drawing to a close. Underneath the vague Pantheisms from the East, brought into the West, into Rome and Spain, through Manicheans and Priscillians, he had detected the corruption of moral life, the relaxing of all the ties of duty and loyalty, and had fought against them to the death, not indeed gently either in word or deed.

Through the subtle speculations of Greek thought he had felt the entangling embrace of a parasite, eating out the life of Christianity, and had kept and unfolded for the Church the great primitive faith in the Divine and human Christ. Around him was a broken, bewildered Christendom; on the shores of Africa, a Church with magnificent traditions of martyrs and fathers, Perpetua, Felicitas, Cyprian, Augustine, long torn to pieces by schisms, now lying helpless under the tyranny of the Arian Vandals, ready to become the prey of the Moslem invasion so soon to come and crush both Catholic and Arian under one weight of death. In the East, heresies innumerable, originating in the subtle thinkers of Alexandria and Antioch, fought out by the fierce monks of the desert; Syria, Greece, Egypt, Carthage biting and devouring one another until the common enemy came and destroyed them all. Spain was in the hands of Arians; Gaul torn between contending races and beliefs; Britain had relapsed into heathenism. The one thing needful at the moment seemed to be *Unity*, and for this unity Leo sacrificed, strove, and toiled. And his own soul being a city at unity

within itself, with primitive simplicity of character, Roman strength of will, Christian singleness of heart, this unity he succeeded in preserving through that distracted age. But always with him unity was a means and not an end, the essential condition of life, valued for the sake of the life it guarded; and always he worked with the sense that he, a mortal man, was working under an Immortal King for an immortal kingdom; always with the sense that he, "the successor of Peter," could do nothing but by standing on the rock of Peter's confession, always translating the old Roman order and law, the old simple apostolic confession of Christ, into the languages of the new world.

So the great Bishop battled on, until at last, six years after he had saved the city for the second time by his mediation with the Vandals, the faithful voice was silenced on earth for ever.

It was in the corridor of the villa on the Sabine hills that Marius brought home the news of the death of Leo. He had just gained one more victory for the faith, over the subtle heresies of the East. "The glory of the day is everywhere arisen," he wrote, "the Divine Mystery, the Incarnation, is restored to the age. It is the world's second Festival since the Advent of the Lord."

The battle for him was over. The great commander could say at last his "Nunc Dimittis," "Let me depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."

And he had been "liberated in peace."

"No more shall we hear his clear strong words of hope and love," Marius said. "No more in any new peril that may come on her will Rome have Leo to save her by throwing himself into the chasm."

A hush of awe and tender gratitude fell on them all. Fabricius said—

"The last of the great Romans has departed."

And Damaris—

"The latest of the great saints has entered into life."

As always, death completed life. And they first saw the noble life in its true meanings and proportions in the silent sculpture of death. They felt he was indeed Leo the Great; and only at the altar, as Monica had said to Augustine, could be his highest commemoration: "With the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven" rendering thanks for all he had done, and been, and become.

When they returned to the Aventine from the solemn obsequies of the Shepherd and Father of Rome, Marius said to Ethne—

"Thou hast never been perplexed by anything that seemed doubtful in the great Bishop's life; not about his contest with Hilary of Arles, nor even about his forbidding the ordination of slaves."

"Why should I?" she said; "Leo never claimed to be anything in himself. Has he not taught usall to say day by day in our prayers, that 'we can do nothing good without God'? Has he not taught us never to be satisfied with ourselves, but always to pray on and on continually for 'the *increase* of faith and hope and charity'? Has he not taught us that the 'world is ordered by the governance,' not of emperors or generals, or the greatest in the world, or the holiest in the Church, but 'by God'? Has he not taught us that the destiny and mission of the Catholic Church, from the lowest to the highest, is not to rule, but to 'serve Him in all godly quietness'?"

"Many think he is building up a new tyranny," Marius said, "in the kingdom of God."

And Ethne replied, with her far-away look as of second sight—

"As far as what Leo builds is only Rome, will it not perish like the other Rome? As far as it is chiefly Peter's, did not the blessed Peter himself sink beneath the waves, only to be saved by the outstretched hand of Peter's Lord? But as far as it is Christ's kingdom and Peter's rock, which is Christ, it cannot fail to stand. We make aqueducts; God only opens the fountains. We build our little houses of clay, which if the life dies out of them become prisons or tombs; the living God creates living worlds. We make empires; God gives us a little child, His Eternal Son, the manger and the cross. Did not Leo tell us that '*Peter is saying still every day throughout the Catholic Church, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*'? And is not our Leo also saying that for ever now, here below, and above?"

"To thee and such as thee indeed he is!" Marius said.

"And you know we have always our twin fountains," she added, "our Aqua Claudia and our Fons Ceruleus, 'the Testaments of God.' We have our one Book, our two literatures, never dead, always spoken to us by the living voice; 'breathed into us,' as Leo told us, 'by the living Spirit.'"

And so the days and years passed on. And the children grew into youth, and the aged passed into the new youth above.

The first to pass away from them was Fabricius. The dishonour and humiliation of Rome had lowered the already ebbing tide of life. His gaze had always been one of wistful yearning towards the past; but towards the close he learned to see that the past lives on in the heavenly future.

After his death the palace on the Aventine became simply a group of homes for the suffering and the destitute. And so by a natural Divine classification, not of like with like, but with unlike, Damaris gathered around her all kinds of suffering and need, the various needs supplying and helping each other: the aged watching the tottering steps of the young; the little ones gladdening the sick and aged; each learning to feel that they had some gift to spare as well as some need to be supplied. And thus with Damaris old age was not a fading, but a ripening into the fuller life. One day she said to Ethne, when some fresh sign of weakness had grieved the daughter's heart, as with a foresight of the close—

"Thou who lovest to dwell among thy fountains surely wilt not grudge me to the land of the fountains of living waters! For what are thy fountains after all, thy 'fountain of heavenly blue' and thy Aqua Claudia, but aqueducts, though indeed aqueducts chiselled by Divine hands? Whence do they come, the ever-flowing, exhaustless springs of thy hills?"

And Ethne said, with the far-off look in her eyes—

"Truly the clouds, mother, are ever feeding the springs, and the clouds drink of the seas; the smallest spring which is perennial must indeed have its source in the infinite and the eternal."

Damaris took her hands and laid them on her own heart.

"Higher than our highest hills," she said, "we must go for our fountains."

"But," said Ethne, "does not the Christ, did not our Leo, speak of a well of living water springing up *within* us, here and now?"

“Surely He does,” Damaris replied. “And if He leads me by His fountains above, I shall know that He, the Source of all the fountains, is with thee here. I am leaving thee in no parched desert land. How else could there be ‘no hunger nor thirst’ for *me*, there?”

“But the City of God,” Ethne resumed, with tearful pleading, “is building also on earth; thou wilt not leave us too soon for the one above? Hast thou not said that our Rome is a city not only of the *fountains*, but of the *steps*? Stay with us! stay with us yet a little while, and help our feebler feet to climb.”

And Damaris *did* stay yet a little while. But at last the last step for her was reached, the step over the invisible threshold—and she entered into light; but she did not leave them in darkness, for as she entered, the light shone through on them.

“Death,” she had been wont to say, “does not close the door of the unseen for us. Death is always keeping it open, both for those he takes and for those he leaves behind.” And when she died they found it true.

As the years went on, glad tidings came from Ireland of more ground conquered, more souls won for Christ.

A beautiful story came of another captive and slave, the maiden Brigit, set free to liberate the hearts of thousands; and from Brigit’s large Irish heart came another hymn, to take its place on Ethne’s heart with Patrick’s breastplate—

“I would a lake of hydromel for the King of kings;
I would that all the people of heaven should drink of it for ever;
I would the viands of faith and piety, and also instruments of penitence in my house;
I would great cups of charity to distribute;
I would cellars full of graces for my companions;
I would that joy should be given at the banquet;
I would that Jesus—Jesus Himself—should reign over it;
I would that the three Maries of illustrious memory,
And that all the spirits should be gathered from all parts;
I would be the steward of the Lord,
And at the cost of a thousand sufferings receive His blessing;
I would a lake of hydromel for the King of kings.”

“The fountain indeed rises and rises in thy Ireland,” Marius would say; “it is becoming a lake, a sea, the source of how many fountains who can say?”

And Ethne—“How can we ever foresee where the new fountains will spring up?”

“No more,” he replied, “than I could foresee *thee*.”

They did not indeed live to see how high the fountains would rise, or how far they would flow. They did not live to hear the great proclamation of freedom go forth from the lips of the great Leo’s successor, the great Gregory, at the manumission of his own slaves, basing the freedom of all men on the creation of man in the image of God, and the Incarnation of the Son in the form of man. They did not indeed live to see the living waters from the two fountains flow forth throughout Western Christendom till they met in our English land, from the great missions of the Benedictines and of the monks of Iona; the era of the great monks and abbots succeeding the era of the great bishops. But they saw their Paul enter the white-robed company of their young kinsman Benedict on Monte Cassino; and they gave their John to join the first-born of Baithene in the great Irish monastery, which nurtured and sent forth Columba. And day by day they and their children pressed onward, in the city, in the solitude, in the home, armed with the breastplate of Patrick’s hymn—

“Christ before
us,
Christ behind us;
Christ around
us,
Christ within us,”

and strong in the strength of Leo’s faith. “*Although He has committed His sheep to the care of many shepherds, Christ Himself has never left the guardianship of His beloved flock.*”

For

“God fulfils Himself in many ways.”

“IPSE TAMEN DILECTI GREGIS CUSTODIAM NON RELIQUIT.”

THE END.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Bagaudæ, the name given to the peasants who revolted against Roman oppression in Gaul, said to be a Celtic word meaning crowd or mob.

[2] *Vide* St. Leo, Epistola 4, ad Episcopos per Campaniam Tusciam, &c., Acta Sanctorum, S. Leonis, Opera 1, p. 611.

[3] S. Leo, Sermon XXIII. These quotations are taken from sermons of S. Leo on the Nativity and the Epiphany, in the Acta Sanctorum.

[4] Epistles of S. Leo. The Tome, 28, Epistle to Flavian, Bishop of Constantinople.

[5] The Tome, 28, Epistle.

[6] St. Benedict was of the Anician house, and the first habit of the Benedictines was of white, or undyed, wool.

[7] St. Columba.

[8] Victor Hugo on Creation and Providence, *Encore Dieu, L'art d'être grandpère*.

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