

  
COSIMO CLASSICS

LITERATURE

# COUNT ROBERT OF PARIS



SIR WALTER SCOTT

Tales of My Landlord

Вальтер Скотт

**Count Robert of Paris**

«РИПОЛ Классик»

1831

**СКОТТ В.**

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They were the literary phenomenon of their time: The Waverly novels, 48 volumes set in fanciful re-creations of the Scottish Highlands (and other lands) of centuries past, published between 1814 and 1831 and devoured by a reading public hungry for these sweeping, interconnected melodramas. The series popularized historical fiction, though they're also abundant in astute political and social commentary. Count Robert of Paris, Volume 46 of Waverly, is part of the fourth and final series in Scott's Tales of My Landlord. Ranging over the Near East, this is a tale of adventure and romance set during the first Crusades in the late 11th century. Scottish novelist and poet SIR WALTER SCOTT (1771–1832), a literary hero of his native land, turned to writing only when his law practice and printing business foundered. Among his most beloved works are The Lady of the Lake (1810), Rob Roy (1818), and Ivanhoe (Waverly Vols. 16 and 11) (1820).

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# Содержание

Introductory Address	6
Chapter I	14
Chapter II	18
Notes to Chapter II	33
Chapter III	34
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	42

# **Sir Walter Scott**

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## Introductory Address

JEDEDIAH CLEISHBOTHAM, M.A.

*To the loving Reader wisheth health and prosperity.*

It would ill become me, whose name has been spread abroad by those former collections, bearing this title of "Tales of my Landlord," and who have, by the candid voice of a numerous crowd of readers, been taught to think that I merit not the empty fame alone, but also the more substantial rewards, of successful pencraft – it would, I say, ill become me to suffer this, my youngest literary babe, and, probably at the same time, the last child of mine old age, to pass into the world without some such modest apology for its defects, as it has been my custom to put forth on preceding occasions of the like nature. The world has been sufficiently instructed, of a truth, that I am not individually the person to whom is to be ascribed the actual inventing or designing of the scheme upon which these Tales, which men have found so pleasing, were originally constructed; as also that neither am I the actual workman, who, furnished by a skilful architect with an accurate plan, including elevations and directions both general and particular, has from thence toiled to bring forth and complete the intended shape and proportion of each division of the edifice. Nevertheless I have been indisputably the man, who, in placing my name at the head of the undertaking, have rendered myself mainly and principally responsible for its general success. When a ship of war goeth forth to battle with her crew, consisting of sundry foremast-men and various officers, such subordinate persons are not said to gain or lose the vessel which they have manned or attacked, (although each was natheless sufficiently active in his own department;) but it is forthwith bruited and noised abroad, without further phrase, that Captain Jedediah Cleishbotham hath lost such a seventy-four, or won that which, by the united exertions of all thereto pertaining, is taken from the enemy. In the same manner, shame and sorrow it were, if I, the voluntary Captain and founder of these adventures, after having upon three divers occasions assumed to myself the emoluments and reputation thereof, should now withdraw myself from the risks of failure proper to this fourth and last outgoing. No! I will rather address my associates in this bottom with the constant spirit of Matthew Prior's heroine:

"Did I but purpose to embark with thee  
On the smooth surface of some summer sea,  
But would forsake the waves, and make the shore,  
When the winds whistle, and the billows roar?"

As little, nevertheless, would it become my years and station not to admit without cavil certain errors which may justly be pointed out in these concluding "Tales of my Landlord," – the last, and, it is manifest, never carefully revised or corrected handiwork, of Mr Peter Pattison, now no more; the same worthy young man so repeatedly mentioned in these Introductory Essays, and never without that tribute to his good sense and talents, nay, even genius, which his contributions to this my undertaking fairly entitled him to claim at the hands of his surviving friend and patron. These pages, I have said, were the *ultimus labor* of mine ingenious assistant; but I say not, as the great Dr Pitcairn of his hero, – *ultimus atque optimus*. Alas! even the giddiness attendant on a journey on this Manchester rail-road is not so perilous to the nerves, as that too frequent exercise in the merry-go-round of the ideal world, whereof the tendency to render the fancy confused, and the judgment inert, hath in all

ages been noted, not only by the erudite of the earth, but even by many of the thick-witted Ofelli themselves; whether the rapid pace at which the fancy moveth in such exercitations, where the wish of the penman is to him like Prince Houssain's tapestry, in the Eastern fable, be the chief source of peril – or whether, without reference to this wearing speed of movement, the dwelling habitually in those realms of imagination, be as little suited for a man's intellect, as to breathe for any considerable space "the difficult air of the mountain top" is to the physical structure of his outward frame – this question belongeth not to me; but certain it is, that we often discover in the works of the foremost of this order of men, marks of bewilderment and confusion, such as do not so frequently occur in those of persons to whom nature hath conceded fancy weaker of wing, or less ambitious in flight.

It is affecting to see the great Miguel Cervantes himself, even like the sons of meaner men, defending himself against the critics of the day, who assailed him upon such little discrepancies and inaccuracies as are apt to cloud the progress even of a mind like his, when the evening is closing around it. "It is quite a common thing," says Don Quixote, "for men who have gained a very great reputation by their writings before they were printed, quite to lose it afterwards, or, at least, the greater part." "The reason is plain," answers the Bachelor Carrasco; "their faults are more easily discovered after the books are printed, as being then more read, and more narrowly examined, especially if the author has been much cried up before, for then the severity of the scrutiny is sure to be the greater. Those who have raised themselves a name by their own ingenuity, great poets and celebrated historians, are commonly, if not always, envied by a set of men who delight in censuring the writings of others, though they could never produce any of their own." – "That is no wonder," quoth Don Quixote; "there are many divines that would make but very dull preachers, and yet are quick enough at finding faults and superfluities in other men's sermons." – "All this is true," says Carrasco, "and therefore I could wish such censurers would be more merciful and less scrupulous, and not dwell ungenerously upon small spots that are in a manner but so many atoms on the face of the clear sun they murmur at» If *aliquando dormitat Homerus*, let them consider how many nights he kept himself awake to bring his noble works to light as little darkened with defects as might be. But, indeed, it may many times happen, that what is censured for a fault, is rather an ornament, as moles often add to the beauty of a face. When all is said, he that publishes a book, runs a great risk, since nothing can be so unlikely as that he should have composed one capable of securing the approbation of every reader." "Sure," says Don Quixote, "that which treats of me can have pleased but few?" "Quite the contrary," says Carrasco; "for as *infinitus est numerus stultorum*, so an infinite number have admired your history. Only some there are who have taxed the author with want of memory or sincerity, because he forgot to give an account who it was that stole Sancho's Dapple, for that particular is not mentioned there, only we find, by the story, that it was stolen; and yet, by and by, we find him riding the same ass again, without any previous light given us into the matter. Then they say that the author forgot to tell the reader what Sancho did with the hundred pieces of gold he found in the portmanteau in the Sierra Morena, for there is not a word said of them more; and many people have a great mind to know what he did with them, and how he spent them; which is one of the most material points in which the work is defective."

How amusingly Sancho is made to clear up the obscurities thus alluded to by the Bachelor Carrasco – no reader can have forgotten; but there remained enough of similar *lacuna*, inadvertencies, and mistakes, to exercise the ingenuity of those Spanish critics, who were too wise in their own conceit to profit by the good-natured and modest apology of this immortal author.

There can be no doubt, that if Cervantes had deigned to use it, he might have pleaded also the apology of indifferent health, under which he certainly laboured while finishing the second part of "Don Quixote." It must be too obvious that the intervals of such a malady as then affected Cervantes, could not be the most favourable in the world for revising lighter compositions, and correcting, at least, those grosser errors and imperfections which each author should, if it were but for shame's sake, remove from his work, before bringing it forth into the broad light of day, where they will never

fail to be distinctly seen, nor lack ingenious persons, who will be too happy in discharging the office of pointing them out.

It is more than time to explain with what purpose we have called thus fully to memory the many venial errors of the inimitable Cervantes, and those passages in which he has rather defied his adversaries than pleaded his own justification; for I suppose it will be readily granted, that the difference is too wide betwixt that great wit of Spain and ourselves, to permit us to use a buckler which was rendered sufficiently formidable only by the strenuous hand in which it was placed.

The history of my first publications is sufficiently well known. Nor did I relinquish the purpose of concluding these "Tales of my Landlord," which had been so remarkably fortunate; but Death, which steals upon us all with an inaudible foot, cut short the ingenious young man to whose memory I composed that inscription, and erected, at my own charge, that monument which protects his remains, by the side of the river Gander, which he has contributed so much to render immortal, and in a place of his own selection, not very distant from the school under my care.<sup>1</sup> In a word, the ingenious Mr Pattison was removed from his place.

Nor did I confine my care to his posthumous fame alone, but carefully inventoried and preserved the effects which he left behind him, namely, the contents of his small wardrobe, and a number of printed books of somewhat more consequence, together with certain woefully blurred manuscripts, discovered in his repository. On looking these over, I found them to contain two Tales called "Count Robert of Paris," and "Castle Dangerous;" but was seriously disappointed to perceive that they were by no means in that state of correctness, which would induce an experienced person to pronounce any writing, in the technical language of bookcraft, "prepared for press." There were not only *hiatus valde deflendi*, but even grievous inconsistencies, and other mistakes, which the penman's leisurely revision, had he been spared to bestow it, would doubtless have cleared away. After a considerate perusal, I no question flattered myself that these manuscripts, with all their faults, contained here and there passages, which seemed plainly to intimate that severe indisposition had been unable to extinguish altogether the brilliancy of that fancy which the world had been pleased to acknowledge in the creations of Old Mortality, the Bride of Lammermoor, and others of these narratives. But I, nevertheless, threw the manuscripts into my drawer, resolving not to think of committing them to the Ballantynian ordeal, until I could either obtain the assistance of some capable person to supply deficiencies, and correct errors, so as they might face the public with credit, or perhaps numerous and more serious avocations might permit me to dedicate my own time and labour to that task.

While I was in this uncertainty, I had a visit from a stranger, who was announced as a young gentleman desirous of speaking with me on particular business. I immediately augured the accession of a new boarder, but was at once checked by observing that the outward man of the stranger was, in a most remarkable degree, what mine host of the Sir William Wallace, in his phraseology, calls *seedy*. His black coat had seen service; the waistcoat of grey plaid bore yet stronger marks of having encountered more than one campaign; his third piece of dress was an absolute veteran compared to the others; his shoes were so loaded with mud as showed his journey must have been pedestrian; and a grey *maud*, which fluttered around his wasted limbs, completed such an equipment as, since Juvenal's days, has been the livery of the poor scholar. I therefore concluded that I beheld a candidate for the vacant office of usher, and prepared to listen to his proposals with the dignity becoming my station; but what was my surprise when I found I had before me, in this rusty student, no less a man than Paul, the brother of Peter Pattison, come to gather in his brother's succession, and possessed, it seemed, with no small idea of the value of that part of it which consisted in the productions of his pen!

<sup>1</sup> See volume IX. of the New Edition of the Waverley Novels, p. 241, for some circumstances attending this erection.



By the rapid study I made of him, this Paul was a sharp lad, imbued with some tincture of letters, like his regretted brother, but totally destitute of those amiable qualities which had often induced me to say within myself, that Peter was, like the famous John Gay, —

"In wit a man, simplicity a child."

He set little by the legacy of my deceased assistant's wardrobe, nor did the books hold much greater value in his eyes: but he peremptorily demanded to be put in possession of the manuscripts, alleging, with obstinacy, that no definite bargain had been completed between his late brother and me, and at length produced the opinion to that effect of a writer, or man of business, — a class of persons with whom I have always chosen to have as little concern as possible.

But I had one defence left, which came to my aid, *tanquam deus ex machinâ*. This rapacious Paul Pattison could not pretend to wrest the disputed manuscripts out of my possession, unless upon repayment of a considerable sum of money, which I had advanced from time to time to the deceased Peter, and particularly to purchase a small annuity for his aged mother. These advances, with the charges of the funeral and other expenses, amounted to a considerable sum, which the poverty-struck student and his acute legal adviser equally foresaw great difficulty in liquidating. The said Mr Paul Pattison, therefore, listened to a suggestion, which I dropped as if by accident, that if he thought himself capable of filling his brother's place of carrying the work through the press, I would make him welcome to bed and board within my mansion while he was thus engaged, only requiring his occasional assistance at hearing the more advanced scholars. This seemed to promise a close of our dispute, alike satisfactory to all parties, and the first act of Paul was to draw on me for a round sum, under pretence that his wardrobe must be wholly refitted. To this I made no objection, though it certainly showed like vanity to purchase garments in the extremity of the mode, when not only great part of the defunct's habiliments were very fit for a twelvemonth's use, but, as I myself had been, but yesterday as it were, equipped in a becoming new stand of black clothes, Mr Pattison would have been welcome to the use of such of my quondam raiment as he thought suitable, as indeed had always been the case with his deceased brother.

The school, I must needs say, came tolerably on. My youngster was very smart, and seemed to be so active in his duty of usher, if I may so speak, that he even overdid his part therein, and I began to feel myself a cipher in my own school.

I comforted myself with the belief that the publication was advancing as fast as I could desire. On this subject, Paul Pattison, like ancient Pistol, "talked bold words at the bridge," and that not only at our house, but in the society of our neighbours, amongst whom, instead of imitating the retired and monastic manner of his brother deceased, he became a gay visitor, and such a reveller, that in process of time he was observed to vilipend the modest fare which had at first been esteemed a banquet by his hungry appetite, and thereby highly displeased my wife, who, with justice, applauds herself for the plentiful, cleanly, and healthy victuals, wherewith she maintains her ushers and boarders.

Upon the whole, I rather hoped than entertained a sincere confidence that all was going on well, and was in that unpleasant state of mind which precedes the open breach between two associates who have been long jealous of each other, but are as yet deterred by a sense of mutual interest from coming to an open rupture.

The first thing which alarmed me was a rumour in the village, that Paul Pattison intended, in some little space, to undertake a voyage to the Continent — on account of his health, as was pretended, but, as the same report averred, much more with the view of gratifying the curiosity which his perusal of the classics had impressed upon him, than for any other purpose. I was, I say, rather alarmed at this *susurrus*, and began to reflect that the retirement of Mr Pattison, unless his loss could be supplied in good time, was like to be a blow to the establishment; for, in truth, this Paul had a winning way with the boys, especially those who were gentle-tempered; so that I must confess my doubts whether,

in certain respects, I myself could have fully supplied his place in the school, with all my authority and experience. My wife, jealous, as became her station, of Mr Pattison's intentions, advised me to take the matter up immediately, and go to the bottom at once; and, indeed, I had always found that way answered best with my boys.

Mrs Cleishbotham was not long before renewing the subject; for, like most of the race of Xantippe, (though my helpmate is a well spoken woman,) she loves to thrust in her oar where she is not able to pull it to purpose. "You are a sharp-witted man, Mr Cleishbotham," would she observe, "and a learned man, Mr Cleishbotham – and the schoolmaster of Gandercleuch, Mr Cleishbotham, which is saying all in one word; hut many a man almost as great as yourself has lost the saddle by suffering an inferior to get up behind him; and though, with the world, Mr Cleishbotham, you have the name of doing every thing, both in directing the school and in this new profitable book line which you have taken up, yet it begins to be the common talk of Gandercleuch, both up the water and down the water, that the usher both writes the dominie's books, and teaches the dominie's school. Ay, ay, ask maid, wife, or widow, and she'll tell ye, the least gaitling among them all comes to Paul Pattison with his lesson as naturally as they come to me for their fourhours, pur things; and never ane thinks of applying to you aboot a kittle turn, or a crabbed word, or about ony thing else, unless it were for *licet exire*, or the mending of an auld pen."

Now, this address assailed me on a summer evening, when I was whiling away my leisure hours with the end of a cutty-pipe, and indulging in such bland imaginations as the Nicotian weed is wont to produce, more especially in the case of studious persons, devoted *musis severioribus*. I was naturally loath to leave my misty sanctuary; and endeavoured to silence the clamour of Mrs Cleishbotham's tongue, which has something in it peculiarly shrill and penetrating. "Woman," said I, with a tone of domestic authority befitting the occasion, "*res tuas agas*; – mind your washings and your wringings, your stuffings and your physicking, or whatever concerns the outward person of the pupils, and leave the progress of their education to my usher, Paul Pattison, and myself."

"I am glad to see," added the accursed woman, (that I should say so!) "that ye have the grace to name him foremost, for there is little doubt that he ranks first of the troop, if ye wad but hear what the neighbours speaker whisper."

"What do they whisper, thou sworn sister of the Eumenides?" cried I, – the irritating *oestrum* of the woman's objurgation totally counterbalancing the sedative effects both of pipe and pot.

"Whisper?" resumed she in her shrillest note – "why, they whisper loud enough for rne at least to hear them, that the schoolmaster of Gandercleuch is turned a doited auld woman, and spends all his time in tippling strong drink with the keeper of the public-house., and leaves school and bookmaking, and a' the rest o't, to the care of his usher; and, also, the wives in Gandercleuch say, that you have engaged Paul Pattison to write a new book, which is to beat a' the lave that gaed afore it; and, to show what a sair lift you have o' the job, you didna sae muckle as ken the name o't – no, nor whether it was to be about some Heathen Greek, or the Black Douglas."

This was said with such bitterness that it penetrated to the very quick, and I hurled the poor old pipe, like one of Homer's spears, not in the face of my provoking helpmate, though the temptation was strong, but into the river Gander, which, as is now well known to tourists from the uttermost parts of the earth, pursues its quiet meanders beneath the bank on which the schoolhouse is pleasantly situated; and, starting up, fixed on my head the cocked hat, (the pride of Messrs Grieve and Scott's repository,) and plunging into the valley of the brook, pursued my way upwards, the voice of Mrs Cleishbotham accompanying me in my retreat with something like the angry scream of triumph with which the brood-geese pursues the flight of some unmannerly cur or idle boy who has intruded upon her premises, and fled before her. Indeed, so great was the influence of this clamour of scorn and wrath which hung upon my rear, that while it rung in my ears, I was so moved that I instinctively tucked the skirts of my black coat under my arm, as if I had been in actual danger of being seized on by the grasp of the pursuing enemy. Nor was it till I had almost reached the well-known burial-

place, in which it was Peter Pattison's hap to meet the far-famed personage called Old Mortality, that I made a halt for the purpose of composing my perturbed spirits, and considering what was to be done; for as yet my mind was agitated by a chaos of passions, of which anger was predominant; and for what reason, or against whom, I entertained such tumultuous displeasure, it was not easy for me to determine.

Nevertheless, having settled my cocked hat with becoming accuracy on my well-powdered wig, and suffered it to remain uplifted for a moment to cool my flushed brow – having, moreover, readjusted and shaken to rights the skirts of my black coat, I came into case to answer to my own questions, which, till these manoeuvres had been sedately accomplished, I might have asked myself in vain.

In the first place, therefore, to use the phrase of Mr Docket, the writer (that is, the attorney) of our village of Gandercleuch, I became satisfied that my anger was directed against all and sundry, or, in law Latin, *contra omnes mortales*, and more particularly against the neighbourhood of Gandercleuch, for circulating reports to the prejudice of my literary talents, as well as my accomplishments as a pedagogue, and transferring the fame thereof to mine own usher. Secondly, against my spouse, Dorothea Cleishbotham, for transferring the said calumnious reports to my ears in a prurient and unseemly manner, and without due respect either to the language which she made use of, or the person to whom she spoke, – treating affairs in which I was so intimately concerned as if they were proper subjects for jest among gossips at a christening, where the womankind claim the privilege of worshipping the *Bona Dea* according to their secret female rites. Thirdly, I became clear that I was entitled to respond to any whom it concerned to enquire, that my wrath was kindled against Paul Pattison, my usher, for giving occasion both for the neighbours of Gandercleuch entertaining such opinions, and for Mrs Cleishbotham disrespectfully urging them to my face, since neither circumstance could have existed, without he had put forth sinful misrepresentations of transactions, private and confidential, and of which I had myself entirely refrained from dropping any the least hint to any third person.

This arrangement of my ideas having contributed to soothe the stormy atmosphere of which they had been the offspring, gave reason a time to predominate, and to ask me, with her calm but clear voice, whether, under all the circumstances, I did well to nourish so indiscriminate an indignation? In fine, on closer examination, the various splenetic thoughts I had been indulging against other parties, began to be merged in that resentment against my perfidious usher, which, like the serpent of Moses, swallowed up all subordinate objects of displeasure. To put myself at open feud with the whole of my neighbours, unless I had been certain of some effectual mode of avenging myself upon them, would have been an undertaking too weighty for my means, and not unlikely, if rashly grappled withal, to end in my ruin. To make a public quarrel with my wife, on such an account as her opinion of my literary accomplishments, would sound ridiculous: and, besides, Mrs C. was sure to have all the women on her side, who would represent her as a wife persecuted by her husband for offering him good advice, and urging it upon him with only too enthusiastic sincerity.

There remained Paul Pattison, undoubtedly, the most natural and proper object of my indignation, since I might be said to have him in my own power, and might punish him by dismissal, at my pleasure. Yet even vindictive proceedings against the said Paul, however easy to be enforced, might be productive of serious consequences to my own purse; and I began to reflect, with anxiety, that in this world it is not often that the gratification of our angry passions lies in the same road with the advancement of our interest, and that the wise man, the *vere sapiens*, seldom hesitates which of these two he ought to prefer.

I recollected also that I was quite uncertain how far the present usher had really been guilty of the foul acts of assumption charged against him.

In a word, I began to perceive that it would be no light matter, at once, and without maturer perpending of sundry collateral *punctiuncula*, to break up a joint-stock adventure, or society, as

civilians term it, which, if profitable to him, had at least promised to be no less so to me, established in years and learning and reputation so much his superior. Moved by which, and other the like considerations, I resolved to proceed with becoming caution on the occasion, and not, by stating my causes of complaint too hastily in the outset, exasperate into a positive breach what might only prove some small misunderstanding, easily explained or apologized for, and which, like a leak in a new vessel, being once discovered and carefully stopped, renders the vessel but more seaworthy than it was before.

About the time that I had adopted this healing resolution, I reached the spot where the almost perpendicular face of a steep hill seems to terminate the valley, or at least divides it into two dells, each serving as a cradle to its own mountain-stream, the Gruff-quack, namely, and the shallower hut more noisy, Gusedub, on the left hand, which, at their union, form the Gander, properly so called. Each of these little valleys has a walk winding up to its recesses, rendered more easy by the labours of the poor during the late hard season, and one of which bears the name of Pattison's path, while the other had been kindly consecrated to my own memory, by the title of the Dominie's Daidling-bit. Here I made certain to meet my associate, Paul Pattison, for by one or other of these roads he was wont to return to my house of an evening, after his lengthened rambles.

Nor was it long before I espied him descending the Gusedub by that tortuous path, marking so strongly the character of a Scottish glen. He was easily distinguished, indeed, at some distance, by his jaunty swagger, in which he presented to you the flat of his leg, like the manly knave of clubs, apparently with the most perfect contentment, not only with his leg and boot., but with every part of his outward man, and the whole fashion of his garments, and, one would almost have thought, the contents of his pockets.

In this, his wonted guise, he approached me, where I was seated near the meeting of the waters, and I could not but discern, that his first impulse was to pass me without any prolonged or formal greeting. But as that would not have been decent, considering the terms on which we stood, he seemed to adopt, on reflection, a course directly opposite; bustled up to me with an air of alacrity, and, I may add, impudence; and hastened at once into the middle of the important affairs which it had been my purpose to bring under discussion in a manner more becoming their gravity. "I am glad to see you, Mr Cleishbotham," said he, with an Inimitable mixture of confusion and effrontery; "the most wonderful news which has been heard in the literary world in my time – all Gandercleuch rings with It – they positively speak of nothing else, from Miss Buskbody's youngest apprentice to the minister himself, and ask each other in amazement, whether the tidings are true or false – to be sure they are of an astounding complexion, especially to you and me."

"Mr Pattison," said I, "I am quite at a loss to guess at your meaning. *Davus sum, non Œdipus* – I am Jedediah Cleishbotham, Schoolmaster of the parish of Gandercleuch; no conjurer, and neither reader of riddles, nor expounder of enigmata."

"Well replied Paul Pattison, "Mr Jedediah Cleishbotham, Schoolmaster of the parish of Gandercleuch, and so forth, all I have to inform you is, that our hopeful scheme is entirely blown up. The tales, on publishing which we reckoned with so much confidence, have already been printed; they are abroad, over all America, and the British papers are clamorous."

I received this news with the same equanimity with which I should have accepted a blow addressed to my stomach by a modern gladiator, with the full energy of his fist. "If this be correct information, Mr Pattison," said I, "I must of necessity suspect you to be the person who have supplied the foreign press with the copy which the printers have thus made an unscrupulous use of, without respect to the rights of the undeniable proprietors of the manuscripts; and I request to know whether this American production embraces the alterations which you as well as I judged necessary, before the work could be fitted to meet the public eye?" To this my gentleman saw it necessary to make a direct answer, for my manner was impressive, and my tone decisive. His native audacity enabled him, however, to keep his ground, and he answered with firmness —

"Mr Cleishbotham, in the first place, these manuscripts, over which you claim a very doubtful right, were never given to any one by me, and must have been sent to America either by yourself, or by some one of the various gentlemen to whom, I am well aware, you have afforded opportunities of perusing my brother's MS. remains."

"Mr Pattison," I replied, "I beg to remind you that it never could be my intention, either by my own hands, or through those of another, to remit these manuscripts to the press, until, by the alterations which I meditated, and which you yourself engaged to make, they were rendered fit for public perusal."

Mr Pattison answered me with much heat: – "Sir, I would have you to know, that if I accepted your paltry offer, it was with less regard to its amount, than to the honour and literary fame of my late brother. I foresaw that if I declined it, you would not hesitate to throw the task into incapable hands, or, perhaps, have taken it upon yourself, the most unfit of all men to tamper with the works of departed genius, and that, God willing, I was determined to prevent – but the justice of Heaven has taken the matter into its own hands. Peter Pattison's last labours shall now go down to posterity unscathed by the scalping-knife of alteration, in the hands of a false friend – shame on the thought that the unnatural weapon could ever be wielded by the hand of a brother!"

I heard this speech not without a species of vertigo or dizziness in my head, which would probably have struck me lifeless at his feet, had not a thought like that of the old ballad —

"Earl Percy sees my fall,"

called to my recollection, that I should only afford an additional triumph by giving way to my feelings in the presence of Mr Paul Pattison, who, I could not doubt, must see more or less directly at the bottom of the Transatlantic publication, and had in one way or another found his own interest in that nefarious transaction.

To get quit of his odious presence I bid him an unceremonious good-night, and marched down the glen with the air not of one who has parted with a friend, but who rather has shaken off an intrusive companion. On the road I pondered the whole matter over with an anxiety which did not in the smallest degree tend to relieve me. Had I felt adequate to the exertion, I might, of course, have supplanted this spurious edition (of which the literary gazettes are already doling out copious specimens) by introducing into a copy, to be instantly published at Edinburgh, adequate correction of the various inconsistencies and imperfections which have already been alluded to. I remember the easy victory of the real second part of these "Tales of my Landlord" over the performance sent forth by an interloper under the same title; and why should not the same triumph be repeated now? There would, in short, have been a pride of talent in this manner of avenging myself, which would have been justifiable in the case of an injured man; but the state of my health has for some time been such as to render any attempt of this nature in every way imprudent.

Under such circumstances, the last "Remains" of Peter Pattison must even be accepted, as they were left in his desk; and I humbly retire in the hope that, such as they are, they may receive the indulgence of those who have ever been but too merciful to the productions of his pen, and in all respects to the courteous reader's obliged servant,

*Gandercleuch,  
15th Oct 1831.*

## Chapter I

*Zeontius. That power that kindly spreads  
The clouds, a signal of impending showers,  
To warn the wandering linnet to the shade,  
Beheld without concern expiring Greece,  
And not one prodigy foretold our fate.  
Demetrius. A thousand horrid prodigies foretold it.  
A feeble government, eluded laws,  
A factious populace, luxurious nobles,  
And all the maladies of sinking states.  
"When public villainy, too strong for justice,  
Shows his bold front, the harbinger of ruin,  
Can brave Leontius call for airy wonders,  
Which cheats interpret, and which fools regard?*

***Irene, Act I.***

The close observers of vegetable nature have remarked, that when a new graft is taken from an aged tree, it possesses indeed in exterior form the appearance of a youthful shoot, but lies in fact attained to the same state of maturity, or even decay, which has been reached by the parent stem. Hence, it is said, arises the general decline and death that about the same season is often observed to spread itself through individual trees of some particular species, all of which, deriving their vital powers from the parent stock, are therefore incapable of protracting their existence longer than it does.

In the same manner, efforts have been made by the mighty of the earth to transplant large cities, states, and communities, by one great and sudden exertion, expecting to secure to the new capital the wealth, the dignity, the magnificent decorations and unlimited extent of the ancient city, which they desire to renovate; while, at the same time, they hope to begin a new succession of ages from the date of the new structure, to last, they imagine, at long, and with as much fame, as its predecessor, which the founder hopes his new metropolis may replace in all its youthful glories. But nature has her laws, which seem to apply to the social as well as the vegetable system. It appears to be a general rule, that what is to last long should be slowly matured and gradually improved, while every sudden effort, however gigantic, to bring about the speedy execution of a plan calculated to endure for ages, is doomed to exhibit symptoms of premature decay from its very commencement. Thus, in a beautiful oriental tale, a dervise explains to the sultan how he had reared the magnificent trees among which they walked, by nursing their shoots from the seed; and the prince's pride is damped when he reflects, that those plantations, so simply raised, were gathering new vigour from each returning sun, while his own exhausted cedars, which had been transplanted by one violent effort, were drooping their majestic heads in the Valley of Orez.<sup>2</sup>

It has been allowed, I believe, by all men of taste, many of whom have been late visitants of Constantinople, that if it were possible to survey the whole globe with a view to fixing a seat of universal empire, all who are capable of making such a choice, would give their preference to the city of Constantine, as including the great recommendations of beauty, wealth, security, and eminence. Yet with all these advantages of situation and climate, and with all the architectural splendour of its churches and halls, its quarries of marble, and its treasure-houses of gold, the imperial founder must himself have learned, that although he could employ all these rich materials in obedience to his own wish, it was the mind of man itself, those intellectual faculties refined by the ancients to the highest

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<sup>2</sup> Tale of Mirglip the Persian, in the Tales of the Genii

degree, which had produced the specimens of talent at which men paused and wondered, whether as subjects of art or of moral labour. The power of the Emperor might indeed strip other cities of their statues and their shrines, in order to decorate that which he had fixed upon as his new capital; but the men who had performed great actions, and those, almost equally esteemed, by whom such deeds were celebrated, in poetry, in painting, and in music, had ceased to exist. The nation, though still the most civilized in the world, had passed beyond that period of society, when the desire of fair fame is of itself the sole or chief motive for the labour of the historian or the poet, the painter or the statuary. The slavish and despotic constitution introduced into the empire, had long since entirely destroyed that public spirit which animated the free history of Rome, leaving nothing but feeble recollections, which produced no emulation.

To speak as of an animated substance, if Constantine could have regenerated his new metropolis, by transfusing into it the vital and vivifying principles of old Rome, – that brilliant spark no longer remained for Constantinople to borrow, or for Rome to lend.

In one most important circumstance, the state of the capital of Constantine had been totally changed, and unspeakably to its advantage. The world was now Christian, and, with the Pagan code, had got rid of its load of disgraceful superstition. Nor is there the least doubt, that the better faith produced its natural and desirable fruits in society, in gradually ameliorating the hearts, and taming the passions, of the people. But while many of the converts were turning meekly towards their new creed, some, in the arrogance of their understanding, were limiting the Scriptures by their own devices, and others failed not to make religious character or spiritual rank the means of rising to temporal power. Thus it happened at this critical period, that the effects of this great change in the religion of the country, although producing an immediate harvest, as well as sowing much good seed which was to grow hereafter, did not, in the fourth century, flourish so as to shed at once that predominating influence which its principles might have taught men to expect.

Even the horrowed splendour, in which Constantine decked his city, bore in it something which seemed to mark premature decay. The imperial founder, in seizing upon the ancient statues, pictures, obelisks, and works of art, acknowledged his own incapacity to supply their place with the productions of later genius; and when the world, and particularly Rome, was plundered to adorn Constantinople, the Emperor, under whom the work was carried on, might be compared to a prodigal youth, who strips an aged parent of her youthful ornaments, in order to decorate a flaunting paramour, on whose brow all must consider them as misplaced.

Constantinople, therefore, when in 324 it first arose in imperial majesty out of the humble Byzantium, showed, even in its birth, and amid its adventitious splendour, as we have already said, some intimations of that speedy decay to which the whole civilized world, then limited within the Roman empire, was internally and imperceptibly tending. Nor was it many ages ere these prognostications of declension were fully verified.

In the year 1080, Alexius Comnenus<sup>3</sup> ascended the throne of the Empire; that is, he was declared sovereign of Constantinople, its precincts and dependencies; nor, if he was disposed to lead a life of relaxation, would the savage incursions of the Scythians or the Hungarians frequently disturb the imperial slumbers, if limited to his own capital. It may be supposed that this safety did not extend much farther; for it is said that the Empress Pulcheria had built a church to the Virgin Mary, as remote as possible from the gate of the city, to save her devotions from the risk of being interrupted by the hostile yell of the barbarians, and the reigning Emperor had constructed a palace near the same spot, and for the same reason.

Alexius Comnenus was in the condition of a monarch who rather derives consequence from the wealth and importance of his predecessors, and the great extent of their original dominions, than from what remnants of fortune had descended to the present generation. This Emperor, except nominally,

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<sup>3</sup> See Gibbon, Chap. XLVIII., for the origin and early history of the house of the Comneni.

no more ruled over his dismembered provinces, than a half-dead horse can exercise power over those limbs, on which the hooded crow and the vulture have already begun to settle and select their prey.

In different parts of his territory, different enemies arose, who waged successful or dubious war against the Emperor; and, of the numerous nations with whom he was engaged in hostilities, whether the Franks from the west, the Turks advancing from the east, the Cumans and Scythians pouring their barbarous numbers and unceasing storm of arrows from the north, and the Saracens, or the tribes into which they were divided, pressing from the south, there was not one for whom the Grecian empire did not spread a tempting repast. Each of these various enemies had their own particular habits of war, and a way of manoeuvring in battle peculiar to themselves. But the Roman, as the unfortunate subject of the Greek empire was still called, was by far the weakest, the most ignorant, and most timid, who could be dragged into the field; and the Emperor was happy in his own good luck, when he found it possible to conduct a defensive war on a counterbalancing principle, making use of the Scythian to repel the Turk, or of both these savage people to drive back the fiery-footed Frank, whom Peter the Hermit had, in the time of Alexius, waked to double fury, by the powerful influence of the crusades.

If, therefore, Alexius Comnenus was, during his anxious seat upon the throne of the East, reduced to use a base and truckling course of policy, – if he was sometimes reluctant to fight when he had a conscious doubt of the valour of his troops, – if he commonly employed cunning and dissimulation instead of wisdom, and perfidy instead of courage – his expedients were the disgrace of the age, rather than his own.

Again, the Emperor Alexius may be blamed for affecting a degree of state which was closely allied to imbecility. He was proud of assuming in his own person, and of bestowing upon others, the painted show of various orders of nobility, even now, when the rank within the prince's gift was become an additional reason for the free barbarian despising the imperial noble. That the Greek court was encumbered with unmeaning ceremonies, in order to make amends for the want of that veneration which ought to have been called forth by real worth, and the presence of actual power, was not the particular fault of that prince, but belonged to the system of the government of Constantinople for ages. Indeed, in its trumpery etiquette, which provided rules for the most trivial points of a man's behaviour during the day, the Greek empire resembled no existing power in its minute follies, except that of Pekin; both, doubtless, being influenced by the same vain wish, to add seriousness and an appearance of importance to objects, which, from their trivial nature, could admit no such distinction.

Yet thus far we must justify Alexius, that, humble as were the expedients he had recourse to, they were more useful to his empire than the measures of a more proud and high-spirited prince might have proved in the same circumstances. He was no champion to break a lance against the breastplate of his Frankish rival, the famous Bohemond of Antioch,<sup>4</sup> but there were many occasions on which he hazarded his life freely; and, so far as we can see, from a minute perusal of his achievements, the Emperor of Greece was never so dangerous "under shield," as when any foeman desired to stop him while retreating from a conflict in which he had been worsted.

But, besides that he did not hesitate, according to the custom of the time, at least occasionally, to commit his person to the perils of close combat, Alexius also possessed such knowledge of a general's profession, as is required in our modern days. He knew how to occupy military positions to the best advantage, and often covered defeats, or improved dubious conflicts, in a manner highly to the disappointment of those who deemed that the work of war was done only on the field of battle.

If Alexius Comnenus thus understood the evolutions of war, he was still better skilled in those of politics, where, soaring far above the express purpose of his immediate negotiation, the Emperor was sure to gain some important and permanent advantage; though very often he was ultimately

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<sup>4</sup> Bohemond, son of Robert Guiscard, the Norman conqueror of Apulia, Calabria, and Sicily, was, at the time when the first crusade began, Count of Tarentum. Though far advanced in life, he eagerly joined the expedition of the Latins, and became Prince of Antioch. For details of his adventures, death, and extraordinary character, see Gibbon, Chap. LIX., and Mills' History of the Crusades, Vol. I.



defeated by the unblushing fickleness, or avowed treachery, of the barbarians, as the Greeks generally termed all other nations, and particularly those tribes, (they can hardly be termed states,) by which their own empire was surrounded.

We may conclude our brief character of Comnenus, by saying, that, had he not been called on to fill the station of a monarch who was under the necessity of making himself dreaded, as one who was exposed to all manner of conspiracies, both in and out of his own family, he might, in all probability, have been regarded as an honest and humane prince. Certainly he showed himself a good-natured man, and dealt less in cutting off heads and extinguishing eyes, than had been the practice of his predecessors, who generally took this method of shortening the ambitious views of competitors.

It remains to be mentioned, that Alexius had his full share of the superstition of the age, which he covered with a species of hypocrisy. It is even said, that his wife, Irene, who of course was best acquainted with the real character of the Emperor, taxed her dying husband with practising, in his last moments, the dissimulation which had been his companion during life.<sup>5</sup> He took also a deep interest in all matters respecting the church, where heresy, which the Emperor held, or affected to hold, in great horror, appeared to him to lurk. Nor do we discover in his treatment of the Manichæans, or Paulicians, that pity for their speculative errors, which modern times might think had been well purchased by the extent of the temporal services of these unfortunate sectaries. Alexius knew no indulgence for those who misinterpreted the myssteries of the church, or of its doctrines; and the duty of defending religion against schismatics was, in his opinion, as peremptorily demanded from him, as that of protecting the empire against the numberless tribes of barbarians who were encroaching on its boundaries on every side.

Such a mixture of sense and weakness, of meanness and dignity, of prudent discretion and poverty of spirit, which last, in the European mode of viewing things, approached to cowardice, formed the leading traits of the character of Alexius Comnenus, at a period when the fate of Greece, and all that was left in that country of art and civilisation, was trembling in the balance, and likely to be saved or lost, according to the abilities of the Emperor for playing the very difficult game which was put into his hands.

These few leading circumstances will recall, to any one who is tolerably well read in history, the peculiarities of the period at which we have found a resting-place for the foundation of our story.

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<sup>5</sup> See Gibbon, Chap. LVI.

## Chapter II

*Othus. This superb successor  
Of the earth's mistress, as thou vainly speakest,  
Stands midst these ages as, on the wide ocean,  
The last spared fragment of a spacious land,  
That in some grand and awful ministration  
Of mighty nature has engulfed been,  
Doth lift aloft its dark and rocky cliffs  
O'er the wild waste around, and sadly frowns  
In lonely majesty.*

### **Constantine Paleologus, Scene I.**

Our scene in the capital of the Eastern Empire opens at what is termed the Golden Gate of Constantinople; and it may be said in passing, that this splendid epithet is not so lightly bestowed as may be expected from the inflated language of the Greeks, which throws such an appearance of exaggeration about them, their buildings, and monuments.

The massive, and seemingly impregnable walls with which Constantine surrounded the city, were greatly improved and added to by Theodosius, called the Great. A triumphal arch, decorated with the architecture of a better, though already a degenerate age, and serving, at the same time, as an useful entrance, introduced the stranger into the city. On the top, a statue of bronze represented.

Victory, the goddess who had inclined the scales of battle in favour of Theodosius; and, as the artist determined to be wealthy if he could not be tasteful, the gilded ornaments with which the inscriptions were set off, readily led to the popular name of the gate. Figures carved in a distant and happier period of the art, glanced from the walls, without assenting happily with the taste in which these were built. The more modern ornaments of the Golden Gate bore, at the period of our story, an aspect very different from those indicating the "conquest brought back to the city," and "the eternal peace" which the flattering inscriptions recorded as having been extorted by the sword of Theodosius. Four or five military engines, for throwing darts of the largest size, were placed upon the summit of the arch; and what had been originally designed as a specimen of architectural embellishment, was now applied to the purposes of defence.

It was the hour of evening, and the cool and refreshing breeze from the sea inclined each passenger, whose business was not of a very urgent description, to loiter on his way, and cast a glance at the romantic gateway, and the various interesting objects of nature and art, which the city of Constantinople presented, as well to the inhabitants as to strangers.<sup>6</sup>

One individual, however, seemed to indulge more wonder and curiosity than could have been expected from a native of the city, and looked upon the rarities around with a quick and startled eye, that marked an imagination awakened by sights that were new and strange. The appearance of this person bespoke a foreigner of military habits, who seemed, from his complexion, to have his birthplace far from the Grecian metropolis, whatever chance had at present brought him to the Golden Gate, or whatever place he filled in the Emperor's service.

This young man was about two-and-twenty years old, remarkably finely-formed and athletic – qualities well understood by the citizens of Constantinople, whose habits of frequenting the public games had taught them at least an acquaintance with the human person, and where, in the select of their own countrymen, they saw the handsomest specimens of the human race.

These were, however, not generally so tall as the stranger at the Golden Gate, while his piercing blue eyes, and the fair hair which descended from under a light helmet gaily ornamented with silver,

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<sup>6</sup> Note I. p. 50. Constantinople.

bearing on its summit a crest resembling a dragon in the act of expanding its terrible jaws, intimated a northern descent, to which the extreme purity of his complexion also bore witness. His beauty, however, though he was eminently distinguished both in features and in person, was not liable to the charge of effeminacy. From this, it was rescued, both by his strength, and by the air of confidence and self-possession with which the youth seemed to regard the wonders around him, not indicating the stupid and helpless gaze of a mind equally inexperienced, and incapable of receiving instruction, but expressing the bold intellect which at once understands the greater part of the information which it receives, and commands the spirit to toil in search of the meaning of that which it has not comprehended, or may fear it has misinterpreted. This look of awakened attention and intelligence gave interest to the young barbarian; and while the bystanders were amazed that a savage from some unknown or remote corner of the universe should possess a noble countenance bespeaking a mind so elevated, they respected him for the composure with which he witnessed so many things, the fashion, the splendour, nay, the very use of which, must have been recently new to him.

The young man's personal equipments exhibited a singular mixture of splendour and effeminacy, and enabled the experienced spectators to ascertain his nation, and the capacity in which he served. We have already mentioned the fanciful and crested helmet, which was a distinction of the foreigner, to which the reader must add in his imagination a small cuirass, or breastplate of silver, so sparingly fashioned as obviously to afford little security to the broad chest, on which it rather hung like an ornament than covered as a buckler; nor, if a well-thrown dart, or strongly-shod arrow, should alight full on this rich piece of armour, was there much hope that it could protect the bosom which it partially shielded.

From betwixt the shoulders hung down over the back what had the appearance of a bearskin; but, when more closely examined, it was only a very skilful imitation of the spoils of the chase, being in reality a surcoat composed of strong shaggy silk, so woven as to exhibit, at a little distance, no inaccurate representation of a bear's hide. A light crooked sword, or scimitar, sheathed in a scabbard of gold and ivory, hung by the left side of the stranger, the ornamented hilt of which appeared much too small for the large-jointed hand of the young Hercules who was thus gaily attired. A dress, purple in colour, and sitting close to the limbs, covered the body of the soldier to a little above the knee; from thence the knees and legs were bare to the calf, to which the reticulated strings of the sandals rose from the instep, the ligatures being there fixed by a golden coin of the reigning Emperor, converted into a species of clasp for the purpose.

But a weapon which seemed more particularly adapted to the young barbarian's size, and incapable of being used by a man of less formidable limbs and sinews, was a battle-axe, the firm iron-guarded staff of which was formed of tough elm, strongly inlaid and defended with brass, while many a plate and ring were indented in the handle, to hold the wood and the steel parts together. The axe itself was composed of two blades, turning different ways, with a sharp steel spike projecting from between them. The steel part, both spike and blade, was burnished as bright as a mirror; and though its ponderous size must have been burdensome to one weaker than himself, yet the young soldier carried it as carelessly along, as if it were but a feather's weight. It was, indeed, a skilfully constructed weapon, so well balanced, that it was much lighter in striking and in recovery, than he who saw it in the hands of another could easily have believed.

The carrying arms of itself showed that the military man was a stranger. The native Greeks had that mark of a civilized people, that they never bore weapons during the time of peace, unless the wearer chanced to be numbered among those whose military profession and employment required them to be always in arms. Such soldiers by profession were easily distinguished from the peaceful citizens; and it was with some evident show of fear as well as dislike, that the passengers observed to each other, that the stranger was a Varangian, an expression which intimated a barbarian of the imperial body-guard.

To supply the deficiency of valour among his own subjects, and to procure soldiers who should be personally dependent on the Emperor, the Greek sovereigns had been, for a great many years, in the custom of maintaining in their pay, as near their person as they could, the steady services of a select number of mercenaries in the capacity of bodyguards, which were numerous enough, when their steady discipline and inflexible loyalty were taken in conjunction with their personal strength and indomitable courage, to defeat, not only any traitorous attempt on the imperial person, but to quell open rebellions, unless such were supported by a great proportion of the military force. Their pay was therefore liberal; their rank and established character for prowess gave them a degree of consideration among the people, whose reputation for valour had not for some ages stood high; and if, as foreigners, and the members of a privileged body, the Varangians were sometimes employed in arbitrary and unpopular services, the natives were so apt to fear, while they disliked them, that the hardy strangers disturbed themselves but little about the light in which they were regarded by the inhabitants of Constantinople. Their dress and accoutrements, while within the city, partook of the rich, or rather gaudy costume, which we have described, bearing only a sort of affected resemblance to that which the Varangians wore in their native forests. But the individuals of this select corps were, when their services were required beyond the city, furnished with armour and weapons more resembling those which they were accustomed to wield in their own country, possessing much less of the splendour of war, and a far greater portion of its effective terrors; and thus they were summoned to take the field.

This body of Varangians (which term is, according to one interpretation, merely a general expression for barbarians) was, in an early age of the empire, formed of the roving and piratical inhabitants of the north, whom a love of adventure, the greatest perhaps that ever was indulged, and a contempt of danger, which never had a parallel in the history of human nature, drove forth upon the pathless ocean. "Piracy," says Gibbon, with his usual spirit, "was the exercise, the trade, the glory, and the virtue of the Scandinavian youth. Impatient of a bleak climate and narrow limits, they started from the banquet, grasped their arms, sounded their horn, ascended their ships, and explored every coast that promised either spoil or settlement."<sup>7</sup>

The conquests made in France and Britain by these wild sea-kings, as they were called, have obscured the remembrance of other northern champions, who, long before the time of Comnenus, made excursions as far as Constantinople, and witnessed with their own eyes the wealth and the weakness of the Grecian empire itself. Numbers found their way thither through the pathless wastes of Russia; others navigated the Mediterranean in their sea-serpents, as they termed their piratical vessels. The Emperors, terrified at the appearance of these daring inhabitants of the frozen zone, had recourse to the usual policy of a rich and unwarlike people, bought with gold the service of their swords, and thus formed a corps of satellites more distinguished for valour than the famed Praetorian Bands of Rome, and, perhaps, because fewer in number, unalterably loyal to their new princes.

But, at a later period of the empire, it began to be more difficult for the Emperors to obtain recruits for their favourite and selected corps, the northern nations having now in a great measure laid aside the piratical and roving habits, which had driven their ancestors from the straits of Elsinore to those of Sestos and Abydos. The corps of the Varangians must therefore have died out, or have been filled up with less worthy materials, had not the conquests made by the Normans in the far distant west, sent to the aid of Comnenus a large body of the dispossessed inhabitants of the islands of Britain, and particularly of England, who furnished recruits to his chosen body-guard. These were, in fact, Anglo-Saxons; but, in the confused idea of geography received at the court of Constantinople, they were naturally enough called Anglo-Danes, as their native country was confounded with the Thule of the ancients, by which expression the archipelago of Zetland and Orkney is properly to be understood, though, according to the notions of the Greeks, it comprised either Denmark or Britain.

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<sup>7</sup> Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. Chapter LV. Vol. X. p. 221, 8vo edition.

The emigrants, however, spoke a language not very dissimilar to the original Varangians, and adopted the name more readily, that it seemed to remind them of their unhappy fate, the appellation being in one sense capable of being interpreted as exiles. Excepting one or two chief commanders, whom the Emperor judged worthy of such high trust, the Varangians were officered by men of their own nation; and with so many privileges, being joined by many of their countrymen from time to time, as the crusades, pilgrimages, or discontent at home, drove fresh supplies of the Anglo-Saxons, or Anglo-Danes, to the east, the Varangians subsisted in strength to the last days of the Greek empire, retaining their native language, along with the unblemished loyalty, and unabated martial spirit, which characterised their fathers.

This account of the Varangian Guard is strictly-historical, and might be proved by reference to the Byzantine historians; most of whom, and also Villehardouin's account of the taking of the city of Constantinople by the Franks and Venetians, make repeated mention of this celebrated and singular body of Englishmen, forming a mercenary guard attendant on the person of the Greek Emperors.<sup>8</sup>

Having said enough to explain why an individual Varangian should be strolling about the Golden Gate, we may proceed in the story which we have commenced.

Let it not be thought extraordinary, that this soldier of the life-guard should be looked upon with some degree of curiosity by the passing citizens. It must be supposed, that, from their peculiar duties, they were not encouraged to hold frequent intercourse or communication with the inhabitants; and, besides that they had duties of police occasionally to exercise amongst them, which made them generally more dreaded than beloved, they were at the same time conscious, that their high pay, splendid appointments, and immediate dependence on the Emperor, were subjects of envy to the other forces. They, therefore, kept much in the neighbourhood of their own barracks, and were seldom seen straggling remote from them, unless they had a commission of government intrusted to their charge.

This being the case, it was natural that a people so curious as the Greeks should busy themselves in eyeing the stranger as he loitered in one spot, or wandered to and fro, like a man who either could not find some place which he was seeking, or had failed to meet some person with whom he had an appointment, for which the ingenuity of the passengers found a thousand different and inconsistent reasons. "A Varangian," said one citizen to another, "and upon duty – ahem I Then I presume to say in your ear" —

"What do you imagine is his object?" enquired the party to whom this information was addressed.

"Gods and goddesses! do you think I can tell you? but suppose that he is lurking here to hear what folk say of the Emperor," answered the *quidnunc* of Constantinople.

"That is not likely," said the querist; "these Varangians do not speak our language, and are not extremely well fitted for spies, since few of them pretend to any intelligible notion of the Grecian tongue. It is not likely, I think, that the Emperor would employ as a spy a man who did not understand the language of the country."

"But if there are, as all men fancy," answered the politician, "persons among these barbarian soldiers who can speak almost all languages, you will admit that such are excellently qualified for seeing clearly around them, since they possess the talent of beholding and reporting, while no one has the slightest idea of suspecting them."

"It may well be," replied his companion; "but since we see so clearly the fox's foot and paws protruding from beneath the seeming sheep's fleece, or rather, by your leave, the *bears* hide yonder, had we not better be jogging homeward, ere it be pretended we have insulted a Varangian Guard?"

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<sup>8</sup> Ducange has poured forth a tide of learning on this curious subject, which will be found in his Notes on Villehardouin's Constantinople under the French Emperors – Paris, 3637, folio, p. 196. Gibbon's History may also be consulted., Vol. X. p. 231. [See Note II. at the end of the Chapter.]

This surmise of danger insinuated by the last speaker, who was a much older and more experienced politician than his friend, determined both on a hasty retreat. They adjusted their cloaks, caught hold of each other's arm, and, speaking fast and thick as they started new subjects of suspicion, they sped, close coupled together, towards their habitations, in a different and distant quarter of the town.

In the meantime, the sunset was nigh over; and the long shadows of the walls, bulwarks, and arches, were projecting from the westward in deeper and blacker shade. The Varangian seemed tired of the short and lingering circle in which he had now trodden for more than an hour, and in which he still loitered like an unliberated spirit, which cannot leave the haunted spot till licensed by the spell which has brought it hither. Even so the barbarian, casting an impatient glance to the sun, which was setting in a blaze of light behind a rich grove of cypress-trees, looked for some accommodation on the benches of stone which were placed under shadow of the triumphal arch of Theodosius, drew the axe, which was his principal weapon, close to his side, wrapped his cloak about him, and, though his dress was not in other respects a fit attire for slumber, any more than the place well selected for repose, yet in less than three minutes he was fast asleep. The irresistible impulse which induced him to seek for repose in a place very indifferently fitted for the purpose, might be weariness consequent upon the military vigils, which had proved a part of his duty on the preceding evening. At the same time, his spirit was so alive within him, even while he gave way to this transient fit of oblivion, that he remained almost awake even with shut eyes, and no hound ever seemed to sleep more lightly than our Anglo-Saxon at the Golden Gate of Constantinople.

And now the slumberer, as the loiterer had been before, was the subject of observation to the accidental passengers. Two men entered the porch in company. One was a somewhat slight-made, but alert-looking man, by name Lysimachus, and by profession a designer. A roll of paper in his hand, with a little satchel containing a few chalks, or pencils, completed his stock in trade; and his acquaintance with the remains of ancient art gave him a power of talking on the subject, which unfortunately bore more than due proportion to his talents of execution. His companion, a magnificent-looking man in form, and so far resembling the young barbarian, but more clownish and peasant-like in the expression of his features, was Stephanos the wrestler, well known in the Palestra.

"Stop here, my friend," said the artist, producing his pencils, "till I make a sketch for my youthful Hercules."

"I thought Hercules had been a Greek," said the wrestler. "This sleeping animal is a barbarian."

The tone intimated some offence, and the designer hastened to soothe the displeasure which he had thoughtlessly excited. Stephanos, known by the surname of Castor, who was highly distinguished for gymnastic exercises, was a sort of patron to the little artist, and not unlikely by his own reputation to bring the talents of his friend into notice.

"Beauty and strength," said the adroit artist, "are of no particular nation; and may our Muse never deign me her prize, but it is my greatest pleasure to compare them, as existing in the uncultivated savage of the north, and when they are found in the darling of an enlightened people, who has added the height of gymnastic skill to the most distinguished natural qualities, such as we can now only see in the works of Phidias and Praxiteles – or in our living model of the gymnastic champions of antiquity."

"Nay, I acknowledge that the Varangian is a proper man," said the athletic hero, softening his tone; "but the poor savage hath not, perhaps in his lifetime, had a single drop of oil on his bosom! Hercules instituted the Isthmian Games" —

"But, hold! what sleeps he with, wrapt so close in his bear-skin?" said the artist. "Is it a club?"

"Away, away, my friend!" cried Stephanos, as they looked closer on the sleeper. "Do you not know that is the instrument of their barbarous office? They do not war with swords or lances, as if destined to attack men of flesh and blood; but with maces and axes, as if they were to hack limbs formed of stone, and sinews of oak. I will wager my crown [of withered parsley] that he lies here to arrest some distinguished commander who has offended the government! He would not have been

thus formidably armed otherwise – Away, away, good Lysimachus; let us respect the slumbers of the bear."

So saying, the champion of the Palestra made off with less apparent confidence than his size and strength might have inspired.

Others, now thinly straggling, passed onward as the evening closed, and the shadows of the cypress-trees fell darker around. Two females of the lower rank cast their eyes on the sleeper. "Holy Maria!" said one, "if he does not put me in mind of the Eastern tale, how the Genie brought a gallant young prince from his nuptial chamber in Egypt, and left him sleeping at the gate of Damascus. I will awake the poor lamb, lest he catch harm from the night dew."

"Harm?" answered the older and crosser-looking woman. "Ay, such harm as the cold water of the Cydnus does to the wild swan. A lamb? – ay, forsooth! Why he's a wolf or a hear, at least a Varangian, and no modest matron would exchange a word with such an unmannered barbarian. I'll tell you what one of these English Danes did to me" —

So saying, she drew on her companion, who followed with some reluctance, seeming to listen to her gabble, while she looked back upon the sleeper.

The total disappearance of the sun, and nearly at the same time the departure of the twilight which lasts so short time in that tropical region – one of the few advantages which a more temperate climate possesses over it, being the longer continuance of that sweet and placid light – gave signal to the warders of the city to shut the folding leaves of the Golden Gate, leaving a wicket lightly bolted for the passage of those whom business might have detained too late without the walls, and indeed for all who chose to pay a small coin. The position and apparent insensibility of the Varangian did not escape those who had charge of the gate, of whom there was a strong guard which belonged to the ordinary Greek forces.

"By Castor and by Pollux," said the centurion, – for the Greeks swore by the ancient deities, although they no longer worshipped them, and preserved those military distinctions with which "the steady Romans shook the world," although they were altogether degenerated from their original manners, – "By Castor and Pollux, comrades, we cannot gather gold in this gate, according as its legend tells us: yet it will be our fault if we cannot glean a goodly crop of silver; and though the golden age be the most ancient and honourable, yet in this degenerate time it is much if we see a glimpse of the inferior metal."

"Unworthy are we to follow the noble centurion Harpax," answered one of the soldiers of the watch, who showed the shaven head and the single tuft<sup>9</sup> of a Mussulman, "if we do not hold silver a sufficient cause to bestir ourselves, when there has been no gold to be had – as, by the faith of an honest man, I think we can hardly tell its colour, – whether out of the imperial treasury, or obtained at the expense of individuals, for many long moons!"

"But this silver," said the centurion, "thou shalt see with thine own eye, and hear it ring a knell in the purse which holds our common stock."

"Which *did* hold it, as thou wouldst say, most valiant commander," replied the inferior warder; "but what that purse holds now, save a few miserable oboli for purchasing certain pickled potherbs and salt fish, to relish our allowance of stummed wine, I cannot tell, but willingly give my share of the contents to the devil, if either purse or platter exhibits symptom of any age richer than the age of copper."

"I will replenish our treasury," said the centurion, "were our stock yet lower than it is. Stand up close by the wicket, my masters. Bethink you, we are the Imperial Guards, or the guards of the Imperial City, it is all one, and let us have no man rush past us on a sudden; – and now that we are on our guard, I will unfold to you – — But stop," said the valiant centurion, "are we all here true brothers? Do all well understand the ancient and laudable customs of our watch, – keeping all things

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<sup>9</sup> One tuft is left on the shaven crown of the Moslem, for the angel to grasp by, when conveying him to Paradise.

secret which concern the profit and advantage of this our vigil, and aiding and abetting the common cause, without information or treachery?"

"You are strangely suspicious to-night," answered the sentinel. "Methinks we have stood by you without tale-telling in matters which were more weighty. Have you forgot the passage of the jeweller – which was neither the gold nor silver age; but if there were a diamond one" —

"Peace, good Ismail the Infidel," said the centurion, – "for, I thank Heaven, we are of all religions, so it is to be hoped we must have the true one amongst us, – Peace, I say; it is unnecessary to prove thou canst keep new secrets, by ripping up old ones. Come hither – look through the wicket to the stone bench, on the shady side of the grand porch – tell me, old lad, what dost thou see there?"

"A man asleep," said Ismail. "By Heaven, I think from what I can see by the moonlight, that it is one of those barbarians, one of those island dogs, whom the Emperor sets such store by!"

"And can thy fertile brain," said the centurion, "spin nothing out of his present situation, tending towards our advantage?"

"Why, ay," said Ismail; "they have large pay, though they are not only barbarians, but pagan dogs, in comparison with us Moslems and Nazarenes. That fellow hath besotted himself with liquor, and hath, not found his way home to his barracks in good time. He will be severely punished, unless we consent to admit him; and to prevail on us to do so, he must empty the contents of his girdle."

"That, at least – that, at least," answered the soldiers of the city watch, but carefully suppressing their voices, though they spoke in an eager tone.

"And is that all that you would make of such an opportunity?" said Harpax, scornfully. "No, no, comrades. If this outlandish animal indeed escape us, he must at least leave his fleece behind. See you not the gleams from his headpiece and his cuirass? I presume these betoken substantial silver, though it may be of the thinnest. There lies the silver mine I spoke of, ready to enrich the dexterous hands who shall labour it."

"But," said timidly, a young Greek, a companion of their watch lately enlisted in the corps, and unacquainted with their habits, "still this barbarian, as you call him, is a soldier of the Emperor; and if we are convicted of depriving him of his arms, we shall be justly punished for a military crime."

"Hear to a new Lycurgus come to teach us our duty!" said the centurion. "Learn first, young man, that the metropolitan cohort never can commit a crime, and learn next, of course, that they can never be convicted of one. Suppose we found a strangling barbarian, a Varangian, like this slumberer, perhaps a Frank, or some other of these foreigners bearing unpronounceable names, while they dishonour us by putting on the arms and apparel of the real Roman soldier, are we, placed to defend an important post, to admit a man so suspicious within our postern, when the event may probably be to betray both the Golden Gate and the hearts of gold who guard it, – to have the one seized, and the throats of the others handsomely cut?"

"Keep him without side the gate, then," replied the novice, "if you think him so dangerous. For my part, I should not fear him, were he deprived of that huge double-edged axe, which gleams from under his cloak, having a more deadly glare than the comet which astrologers prophesy such strange things of."

"Nay, then, we agree together," answered Harpax, "and you speak like a youth of modesty and sense; and I promise you the state will lose nothing in the despoiling of this same barbarian. Each of these savages hath a double set of accoutrements, the one wrought with gold, silver, inlaid work, and ivory, as becomes their duties in the prince's household; the other fashioned of triple steel, strong, weighty, and irresistible. Now, in taking from this suspicious character his silver helmet and cuirass, you reduce him to his proper weapons, and you will see him start up in arms fit for duty."

"Yes," said the novice; "but I do not see that this reasoning will do more than warrant our stripping the Varangian of his armour, to he afterwards heedfully returned to him on the morrow, if he prove a true man. How, I know not, but I had adopted some Idea that it was to be confiscated for our joint behoof."



"Unquestionably," said Harpax; "for such has been the rule of our watch ever since the days of the excellent centurion Sisyphus, in whose time it first was determined, that all contraband commodities, or suspicious weapons, or the like, which were brought into the city during the night-watch, should be uniformly forfeited to the use of the soldiery of the guard; and where the Emperor finds the goods or arms unjustly seized, I hope he is rich enough to make it up to the sufferer."

"But still – but still," said Sebastes of Mitylene, the young Greek aforesaid, "were the Emperor to discover" —

"Ass!" replied Harpax, "he cannot discover, if he had all the eyes of Argus's tail. – Here are twelve of us, sworn, according to the rules of the watch, to abide in the same story. Here is a barbarian, who, if he remembers any thing of the matter – which I greatly doubt – his choice of a lodging arguing his familiarity with the wine-pot – tells but a wild tale of losing his armour, which we, my masters," (looking round to his companions,) "deny stoutly – I hope we have courage enough for that – and which party will be believed? The companions of the watch, surely!"

"Quite the contrary," said Sebastes. "I was born at a distance from hence; yet, even in the island of Mitylene, the rumour had reached me that the cavaliers of the city-guard of Constantinople were so accomplished in falsehood, that the oath of a single barbarian would outweigh the Christian oath of the whole body, if Christian some of them are – for example, this dark man with a single tuft on his head."

"And if it were even so," said the centurion, with a gloomy and sinister look, "there is another way of making the transaction a safe one."

Sebastes, fixing his eye on his commander, moved his hand to the hilt of an Eastern poniard which he wore, as if to penetrate his exact meaning. The centurion nodded in acquiescence.

"Young as I am," said Sebastes, "I have been already a pirate five years at sea, and a robber three years now in the hills, and it is the first time I have seen or heard a man hesitate, in such a case, to take the only part which is worth a brave man's while to resort to in a pressing affair."

Harpax struck his hand into that of the soldier, as sharing his uncompromising sentiments; but when he spoke, it was in a tremulous voice.

"How shall we deal with him?" said he to Sebastes, who, from the most raw recruit in the corps, had now risen to the highest place in his estimation.

"Any how," returned the islander; "I see bows here and shafts, and if no other person can use them" —

"They are not," said the centurion, "the regular arms of our corps."

"The fitter you to guard the gates of a city," said the young soldier with a horse-laugh, which had something insulting in it. "Well – be it so. I can shoot like a Scythian," he proceeded; "nod but with your head, one shaft shall crash among the splinters of his skull and his brains; the second shall quiver in his heart."

"Bravo, my noble comrade!" said Harpax, in a tone of affected rapture, always lowering his voice, however, as respecting the slumbers of the Varangian. "Such were the robbers of ancient days, the Diomedes, Corynetes, Synnes, Scyrons, Procrustes, whom it required demigods to bring to what was miscalled justice, and whose compeers and fellows will remain masters of the continent and the isles of Greece, until Hercules and Theseus shall again appear upon earth. Nevertheless, shoot not, my valiant Sebastes – draw not the bow, my invaluable Mitylenian; you may wound and not kill."

"I am little wont to do so," said Sebastes, again repeating the hoarse, chuckling, discordant laugh, which grated upon the ears of the centurion, though he could hardly tell the reason why it was so uncommonly unpleasant.

"If I look not about me," was his internal reflection, "we shall have two centurions of the watch, instead of one. This Mitylenian, or be he who the devil will, is a bow's length beyond me. I must keep my eye on him." He then spoke aloud, in a tone of authority. "But come, young man, it is hard to discourage a young beginner. If you have been such a rover of wood and river as you tell us of,

you know how to play the Sicarius: there lies your object, drunk or asleep, we know not which; – you will deal with him in either case."

"Will you give me no odds to stab a stupified or drunken man, most noble centurion?" answered the Greek. "You would perhaps love the commission yourself?" he continued, somewhat ironically.

"Do as you are directed, friend," said Harpax, pointing to the turret staircase which led down from the battlement to the arched entrance underneath the porch.

"He has the true cat-like stealthy pace," half muttered the centurion, as his sentinel descended to do such a crime as he was posted there to prevent. "This cockrel's comb must be cut, or he will become king of the roost. But let us see if his hand be as resolute as his tongue; then we will consider what turn to give to the conclusion."

As Harpax spoke between his teeth, and rather to himself than any of his companions, the Mitylenian emerged from under the archway, treading on tiptoe, yet swiftly, with an admirable mixture of silence and celerity. His poniard, drawn as he descended, gleamed in his hand, which was held a little behind the rest of his person, so as to conceal it. The assassin hovered less than an instant over the sleeper, as if to mark the interval between the ill-fated silver corslet, and the "body which it was designed to protect, when, at the instant the blow was rushing to its descent, the Varangian started up at once, arrested the armed hand of the assassin, by striking it upwards with the head of his battle-axe; and while he thus parried the intended stab, struck the Greek a blow heavier than Sebastes had ever learned at the Pancration, which left him scarce the power to cry help to his comrades on the battlements. They saw what had happened, however, and beheld the barbarian set his foot on their companion, and brandish high his formidable weapon, the whistling sound of which made the old arch ring ominously, while he paused an instant, with his weapon upheaved, ere he gave the finishing blow to his enemy. The warders made a bustle, as if some of them would descend to the assistance of Sebastes, without, however, appearing very eager to do so, when Harpax, in a rapid whisper, commanded them to stand fast.

"Each man to his place," he said, "happen what may. Yonder comes a captain of the guard – the secret is our own, if the savage has killed the Mitylenian, as I well trust, for he stirs neither hand nor foot. But if he lives, my comrades, make hard your faces as flint – he is but one man, we are twelve. We know nothing of his purpose, save that he went to see wherefore the barbarian slept so near the post."

While the centurion thus bruited his purpose in busy insinuation to the companions of his watch, the stately figure of a tall soldier, richly armed, and presenting a lofty crest, which glistened as he stepped from the open moonlight into the shade of the vault, became visible beneath. A whisper passed among the warders on the top of the gate.

"Draw bolt, shut gate, come of the Mitylenian what will," said the centurion; "we are lost men if we own him. – Here comes the chief of the Varangian axes, the Follower himself."

"Well, Hereward," said the officer who came last upon the scene, in a sort of *lingua Franca*, generally used by the barbarians of the guard, "hast thou caught a night-hawk?"

"Ay, by Saint George!" answered the soldier; "and yet, in my country, we would call him but a kite."

"What is he?" said the leader.

"He will tell you that himself," replied the Varangian, "when I take my grasp from his windpipe."

"Let him go, then," said the officer.

The Englishman did as he was commanded; but, escaping as soon as he felt himself at liberty, with an alertness which could scarce have been anticipated, the Mitylenian rushed out at the arch, and, availing himself of the complicated ornaments which had originally graced the exterior of the gateway, he fled around buttress and projection, closely pursued by the Varangian, who, cumbered with his armour, was hardly a match in the course for the light-footed Grecian, as he dodged his

pursuer from one skulking place to another. The officer laughed heartily, as the two figures, like shadows appearing, and disappearing as suddenly, held rapid flight and chase around the arch of Theodosius.

"By Hercules! it is Hector pursued round the walls of Ilion by Achilles," said the officer; "but my Pelides will scarce overtake the son of Priam. What, ho! goddess-born – son of the white-footed Thetis! – But the allusion is lost on the poor savage. – Hollo, Hereward! I say, stop – know thine own most barbarous name." These last words were muttered; then raising his voice, "Do not out-run thy wind, good Hereward. Thou mayst have more occasion for breath to-night."

"If it had been my leader's will," answered the Varangian, coming back in sulky mood, and breathing like one who had been at the top of his speed, "I would have had him as fast as ever greyhound held hare, ere I left off the chase. Were it not for this foolish armour, which encumbers without defending one, I would not have made two bounds without taking him by the throat."

"As well as it is," said the officer, who was, in fact, the Accoulouthos, or *Follower*, so called because it was the duty of this highly-trusted officer of the Varangian Guards constantly to attend on the person of the Emperor. "But let us now see by what means we are to regain our entrance through the gate: for if, as I suspect, it was one of those warders who was willing to have played thee a trick, his companions may not let us enter willingly."

"And is it not," said the Varangian, "your Valour's duty to probe this want of discipline to the bottom?"

"Hush thee here, my simple-minded savage! I have often told you, most ignorant Hereward, that the skulls of those who come from your cold and muddy Bœotia of the North, are fitter to bear out twenty blows with a sledge-hammer, than turn off one witty or ingenious idea. But follow me, Hereward, and although I am aware that showing the fine meshes of Grecian policy to the coarse eye of an unpractised barbarian like thee, is much like casting pearls before swine, a thing forbidden in the Blessed Gospel, yet, as thou hast so good a heart, and so trusty, as is scarce to be met with among my Varangians themselves, I care not if, while thou art in attendance on my person, I endeavour to indoctrinate thee in some of that policy by which I myself – the Follower – the Chief of the Varangians, and therefore erected by their axes into the most valiant of the valiant, am content to guide myself, although every way qualified to bear me through the cross currents of the court by main pull of oar and press of sail – a condescension in me, to do that by policy, which no man in this imperial court, the chosen sphere of superior wits, could so well accomplish by open force as myself. What think'st thou, good savage?"

"I know," answered the Varangian, who walked about a step and a half behind his leader, like an orderly of the present day behind his officer's shoulder, "I should be sorry to trouble my head with what I could do by my hands at once."

"Did I not say so?" replied the Follower, who had now for some minutes led the way from the Golden Gate, and was seen gliding along the outside of the moonlight walls, as if seeking an entrance elsewhere. "Lo, such is the stuff of what you call your head is made! Your hands and arms are perfect Achitophels, compared to it. Harken to me, thou most ignorant of all animals, – but, for that very reason, thou stoutest of confidants, and bravest of soldiers, – I will tell thee the very riddle of this night-work, and yet, even then, I doubt if thou canst understand me."

"It is my present duty to try to comprehend your Valour," said the Varangian – "I would say your policy, since you condescend to expound it to me. As for your valour," he added, "I should be unlucky if I did not think I understand its length and breadth already."

The Greek general coloured a little, but replied, with unaltered voice, "True, good Hereward. We have seen each other in battle."

Hereward here could not suppress a short cough, which, to those grammarians of the day who were skilful in applying the use of accents, would have implied no peculiar eulogium on his officer's military bravery. Indeed, during their whole intercourse, the conversation of the General, in spite

of his tone of affected importance and superiority, displayed an obvious respect for his companion, as one who, in many points of action, might, if brought to the test, prove a more effective soldier than himself. On the other hand, when the powerful Northern warrior replied, although it was with all observance of discipline and duty, yet the discussion might sometimes resemble that between an ignorant macaroni officer, before the Duke of York's reformation of the British army, and a steady sergeant of the regiment in which they both served. There was a consciousness of superiority, disguised by external respect, and half admitted by the leader.

"You will grant me, my simple friend," continued the chief, in the same tone as before, "in order to lead thee by a short passage into the deepest principle of policy which pervades this same court of Constantinople, that the favour of the Emperor" – (here the officer raised his casque, and the soldier made a semblance of doing so also) – "who (be the place where he puts his foot sacred!) is the vivifying principle of the sphere in which we live, as the sun itself is that of humanity" —

"I have heard something like this said by our tribunes," said the Varangian.

"It is their duty so to instruct you," answered the leader; "and I trust that the priests also, in their sphere, forget not to teach my Varangians their constant service to their Emperor."

"They do not omit it," replied the soldier, "though we of the exiles know our duty."

"God forbid I should doubt it," said the commander of the battle-axes. "All I mean is to make thee understand, my dear Hereward, that as there are, though perhaps such do not exist in thy dark and gloomy climate, a race of insects which are born in the first rays of the morning, and expire with those of sunset, (thence called by us ephemerae, as enduring one day only,) such is the case of a favourite at court, while enjoying the smiles of the most sacred Emperor. And happy is he whose favour, rising as the person of the sovereign emerges from the level space which extends around the throne, displays itself in the first imperial blaze of glory, and who, keeping his post during the meridian splendour of the crown, has only the fate to disappear and die with the last beam of imperial brightness."

"Your Valour," said the islander, "speaks higher language than my northern wits are able to comprehend. Only, methinks, rather than part with life at the sunset, I would, since insect I must needs be, become a moth for two or three dark hours."

"Such is the sordid desire of the vulgar, Hereward," answered the Follower, with assumed superiority, "who are contented to enjoy life, lacking distinction; whereas we, on the other hand, we of choicer quality, who form the nearest and innermost circle around the Imperial Alexius, in which he himself forms the central point, are watchful, to woman's jealousy, of the distribution of his favours, and omit no opportunity, whether by leaguings with or against each other, to recommend ourselves individually to the peculiar light of his countenance."

"I think I comprehend what you mean," said the guardsman; "although as for living such a life of intrigue – but that matters not."

"It does indeed matter not, my good Hereward," said his officer, "and thou art lucky in having no appetite for the life I have described. Yet have I seen barbarians rise high in the empire, and if they have not altogether the flexibility, the malleability, as it is called – that happy ductility which can give way to circumstances, I have yet known those of barbaric tribes, especially if bred up at court from their youth, who joined to a limited portion of this flexible quality enough of a certain tough durability of temper, which, if it does not excel in availing itself of opportunity, has no contemptible talent at creating it. But letting comparisons pass, it follows, from this emulation of glory, that is, of royal favour, amongst the servants of the imperial and most sacred court, that each is desirous of distinguishing himself by showing to the Emperor, not only that he fully understands the duties of his own employments, but that he is capable, in case of necessity, of discharging those of others."

"I understand," said the Saxon; "and thence it happens that the under ministers, soldiers, and assistants of the great crown-officers, are perpetually engaged, not in aiding each other, but in acting as spies on their neighbours' actions?"

"Even so," answered the commander; "it is but few days since I had a disagreeable instance of it. Every one, however dull in the intellect, hath understood this much, that the great Protospathaire,<sup>10</sup> which title thou knowest signifies the General-in-chief of the forces of the empire, hath me at hatred, because I am the leader of those redoubtable Varangians, who enjoy, and well deserve, privileges exempting them from the absolute command which he possesses over all other corps of the army – an authority which becomes Nicanor, notwithstanding the victorious sound of his name, nearly as well as a war-saddle would become a bullock."

"How!" said the Varangian, "does the Protogpathaire pretend to any authority over the noble exiles? – By the red dragon, under which we will live and die, we will obey no man alive but Alexius Comnenus himself, and our own officers!"

"Rightly and bravely resolved," said the leader; "but, my good Hereward, let not your just indignation hurry you so far as to name the most sacred Emperor, without raising your hand to your casque, and adding the epithets of his lofty rank."

"I will raise my hand often enough and high enough," said the Norseman, "when the Emperor's service requires it."

"I dare be sworn thou wilt," said Achilles Tatins, the commander of the Varangian Imperial Body Guard, who thought the time was unfavourable for distinguishing himself by insisting on that exact observance of etiquette, which was one of his great pretensions to the name of a soldier. "Yet, were it not for the constant vigilance of your leader, my child, the noble Varangians would be trode down, in the common mass of the army, with the heathen cohorts of Huns, Scythians, or those turban'd infidels the renegade Turks; and even for this is your commander here in peril, because he vindicates his axe-men as worthy of being prized above the paltry shafts of the Eastern tribes, and the javelins of the Moors, which are only fit to be playthings for children."

"You are exposed to no danger," said the soldier, closing up to Achilles in a confidential manner, "from which these axes can protect you."

"Do I not know it?" said Achilles. "But it is to your arm alone that the Follower of his most sacred Majesty now intrusts his safety."

"In aught that a soldier may do," answered Hereward; "make your own computation, and then reckon this single arm worth two against any man the Emperor has, not being of our own corps."

"Listen, my brave friend," continued Achilles. "This Nicanor was daring enough to throw a reproach on our noble corps, accusing them – gods and goddesses! – of plundering in the field, and, yet more sacrilegious, of drinking the precious wine which was prepared for his most sacred Majesty's own blessed consumption. I, the sacred person of the Emperor being present, proceeded, as thou mayst well believe" —

"To give him the lie in his audacious throat!" burst in the Varangian – "named a place of meeting somewhere in the vicinity, and called the attendance of your poor follower, Hereward of Hampton, who is your bond-slave for life long, for such an honour! I wish only you had told me to get my work-day arms; but, however, I have my battle-axe, and" – Here his companion seized a moment to break in, for he was somewhat abashed at the lively tone of the young soldier.

"Hush thee, my son," said Achilles Tatius; "speak low, my excellent Here ward. Thou mistakest this thing. With thee by my side, I would not, indeed, hesitate to meet five such as Nicanor; but such is not the law of this most hallowed empire, nor the sentiments of the three times illustrious Prince who now rules it. Thou art debauched, my soldier, with the swaggering stories of the Franks, of whom we hear more and more every day."

"I would not willingly borrow any thing from those whom you call Franks, and we Normans," answered the Varangian, in a disappointed, dogged tone.

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<sup>10</sup> Literally, the First Swordsman.

"Why, listen, then," said the officer, as they proceeded on their walk, "listen to the reason of the thing, and consider whether such a custom can obtain, as that which they term the duello, in any country of civilisation and common sense, to say nothing of one which is blessed with the domination of the most rare Alexius Comnenus. Two great lords, or high officers, quarrel in the court, and before the reverend person of the Emperor. They dispute about a point of fact. Now, instead of each maintaining his own opinion, by argument or evidence, suppose they had adopted the custom of these barbarous Franks, – 'Why, thou liest in thy throat,' says the one; 'and thou liest in thy very lungs,' says another; and they measure forth the lists of battle in the next meadow. Each swears to the truth of his quarrel, though probably neither well knows precisely how the fact stands. One, perhaps the hardier, truer, and better man of the two, the Follower of the Emperor, and father of the Varangians, (for death, my faithful follower, spares no man,) lies dead on the ground, and the other comes back to predominate in the court, where, had the matter been enquired into by the rules of common sense and reason, the victor, as he is termed, would have been sent to the gallows. And yet this is the law of arms, as your fancy pleases to call it, friend Hereward!"

"May it please your Valour," answered the barbarian, "there is a show of sense in what you say; but you will sooner convince me that this blessed moonlight is the blackness of a wolf's mouth, than that I ought to hear myself called liar, without cramming the epithet down the speaker's throat with the spike of my battle-axe. The lie is to a man the same as a blow, and a blow degrades him into a slave and a beast of burden, if endured without retaliation."

"Ay, there it is!" said Achilles; "could I but get you to lay aside that inborn barbarism, which leads you, otherwise the most disciplined soldiers who serve the sacred Emperor, into such deadly quarrels and feuds" —

"Sir Captain," said the Varangian, in a sullen tone, "take my advice, and take the Varangians as you have them; for, believe my word, that if you could teach them to endure reproaches, hear the lie, or tolerate stripes, you would hardly find them, when their discipline is completed, worth the single day's salt which they cost to his holiness, if that be his title. I must tell you, moreover, valorous sir, that the Varangians will little thank their leader, who heard them called marauders, drunkards, and what not, and repelled not the charge on the spot."

"Now, if I knew not the humours of my barbarians," thought Tatius, in his own mind, "I should bring on myself a quarrel with these untamed islanders, who the Emperor thinks can be so easily kept in discipline. But I will settle this sport presently." Accordingly, he addressed the Saxon in a soothing tone.

"My faithful soldier," he proceeded aloud, "we Romans, according to the custom of our ancestors, set as much glory on actually telling the truth, as you do in resenting the imputation of falsehood; and I could not with honour return a charge of falsehood upon Nicanor, since what he said was substantially true."

"What! that we Varangians were plunderers, drunkards, and the like?" said Hereward, more impatient than before.

"No, surely, not in that broad sense," said Achilles; "but there was too much foundation for the legend."

"When and where?" asked the Anglo-Saxon.

"You remember," replied his leader, "the long march near Laodicea, where the Varangians beat off a cloud of Turks, and retook a train of the imperial baggage? You know what was done that day — how you quenched your thirst, I mean?"

"I have some reason to remember it," said Hereward of Hampton; "for we were half choked with dust, fatigue, and, which was worst of all, constantly fighting with our faces to the rear, when we found some firkins of wine in certain carriages which were broken down — down our throats it went, as if it had been the best ale in Southampton."

"Ah, unhappy!" said the Follower; "saw you not that the firkins were stamped with the thrice excellent Grand Butler's own inviolable seal, and set apart for the private use of his Imperial Majesty's most sacred lips?"

"By good Saint George of merry England, worth a dozen of your Saint George of Cappadocia, I neither thought nor cared about the matter," answered Hereward. "And I know your Valour drank a mighty draught yourself out of my headpiece; not this silver bauble, but my steel-cap, which is twice as ample. By the same token, that whereas before you were giving orders to fall back, you were a changed man when you had cleared your throat of the dust, and cried, 'Bide the other brunt, my brave and stout boys of Britain!'"

"Ay," said Achilles, "I know I am but too apt to be venturous in action. But you mistake, good Hereward; the wine I tasted in the extremity of martial fatigue, was not that set apart for his sacred Majesty's own peculiar mouth, but a secondary sort, preserved for the Grand Butler himself, of which, as one of the great officers of the household, I might right lawfully partake – the chance was nevertheless sinfully unhappy."

"On my life," replied Hereward, "I cannot see the infelicity of drinking, when we are dying of thirst."

"But, cheer up, my noble comrade," said Achilles, after he had hurried over his own exculpation, and without noticing the Varangian's light estimation of the crime, "his Imperial Majesty, in his ineffable graciousness, imputes these ill-advised draughts as a crime to no one who partook of them. He rebuked the Protospathaire for fishing up this accusation, and said, when he had recalled the hustle and confusion of that toilsome day, 'I thought myself well off amid that seven times heated furnace, when we obtained a draught of the barley-wine drank by my poor Varangians; and I drank their health, as well I might, since, had it not been for their services, I had drunk my last; and well fare their hearts, though they quaffed my wine in return!' And with that he turned off, as one who said, 'I have too much of this, being a finding of matter and ripping up of stories against Achilles Tatius and his gallant Varangians.'"

"Now, may God bless his honest heart for it!" said Hereward, with more downright heartiness than formal respect. "I'll drink to his health in what I put next to my lips that quenches thirst, whether it may be ale, wine, or ditch-water."

"Why, well said, but speak not above thy breath! and remember to put thy hand to thy forehead, when naming, or even thinking of the Emperor! – Well, thou knowest, Hereward, that having thus obtained the advantage, I knew that the moment of a repulsed attack is always that of a successful charge; and so I brought against the Protospathaire, Nicanor, the robberies which have been committed at the Golden Gate, and other entrances of the city, where a merchant was but of late kidnapped and murdered, having on him certain jewels, the property of the Patriarch."

"Ay I indeed?" said the Varangian; "and what said Alex – I mean the most sacred Emperor, when he heard such things said of the city warders? – though he had himself given, as we say in our land, the fox the geese to keep."

"It may be he did," replied Achilles; "but he is a sovereign of deep policy, and was resolved not to proceed against these treacherous warders, or their general, the Protospathaire, without decisive proof. His sacred Majesty, therefore, charged me to obtain specific circumstantial proof by thy means."

"And that I would have managed in two minutes, had you not called me off the chase of yon cut-throat vagabond. But his grace knows the word of a Varangian, and I can assure him that either lucre of my silver gaberdine, which they nickname a cuirass, or the hatred of my corps, would be sufficient to incite any of these knaves to cut the throat of a Varangian, who appeared to be asleep. – So we go, I suppose, captain, to bear evidence before the Emperor to this night's work?"

"No, my active soldier, hadst thou taken the runaway villain, my first act must have been to set him free again; and my present charge to you is, to forget that such an adventure has ever taken place."

"Ha!" said the Varangian; "this is a change of policy indeed!"

"Why, yes, brave Hereward; ere I left the palace this night, the Patriarch made overtures of reconciliation betwixt me and the Protospathaire, which, as our agreement is of much consequence to the state, I could not very well reject, either as a good soldier or a good Christian. All offences to my honour are to be in the fullest degree repaid, for which the Patriarch interposes his warrant. The Emperor, who will rather wink hard than see disagreements, loves better the matter should be slurred over thus."

"And the reproaches upon the Varangians," said Hereward —

"Shall be fully retracted and atoned for," answered Achilles; "and a weighty donative in gold dealt among the corps of the Anglo-Danish axemen. Thou, my Hereward, mayst be distributor; and thus, if well-managed, mayst plate thy battle-axe with gold."

"I love my axe better as it is," said the Varangian. "My father bore it against the robber Normans at Hastings. Steel instead of gold for my money."

"Thou mayst make thy choice, Hereward," answered his officer; "only, if thou art poor, say the fault was thine own."

But here, in the course of their circuit round Constantinople, the officer and his soldier came to a very small wicket or sallyport, opening on the interior of a large and massive advanced work, which terminated an entrance to the city itself. Here the officer halted, and made his obedience, as a devotee who is about to enter a chapel of peculiar sanctity.



## Notes to Chapter II

### Note I., – Constantinople

The impression which the imperial city was calculated to make on such visitors as the Crusaders of the West, is given by the ancient French chronicler Villehardouin, who was present at the capture of A. D. 1203. "When we had come," he says, "within three leagues, to a certain Abbey, then we could plainly survey Constantinople. There the ships and the galleys came to anchor; and much did they who had never been in that quarter before, gaze upon the city. That such a city could be in the world they had never conceived, and they were never weary of staring at the high walls and towers with which it was entirely encompassed, the rich palaces and lofty churches, of which there were so many that no one could have believed it, if he had not seen with his own eyes that city, the Queen of all cities. And know that there was not so bold a heart there, that it did not feel some terror at the strength of Constantinople." – Chap. 66.

Again, – "And now many of those of the host went to see Constantinople within, and the rich palaces and stately churches of which it possesses so many, and the riches of the place, which are such as no other city ever equalled. I need not speak of the sanctuaries, which are as many as are in all the world beside." – Chap. 100.

### Note II., – Varangians

Villehardouin, in describing the siege of Constantinople, A. D. 1203, says, "Li murs fu mult garnis d'Anglois et de Danois," – hence the dissertation of Ducange here quoted, and several articles besides in his Glossarium, as *Varangi*, *Warengangi*, &c. The etymology of the name is left uncertain, though the German *fort-ganger*, *i. e.* forth-goer, wanderer, *exile*, seems the most probable. The term occurs in various Italian and Sicilian documents, anterior to the establishment of the Varangian Guards at Constantinople, and collected by Muratori; as, for instance, in an edict of one of the Lombard kings, "Omnes Warengangi, qui de exteris finibus in regni nostri finibus advenerint, seque sub scuto potestatis nostras subdiderint, legibus nostris Longobardorum vivere debeant," – and in another, "De Warengangis, nobiles, mediocribus, et rusticis hominibus, qui usque nunc in terra vestra fugiti sunt, habeatis eos." – *Muratori*, vol. ii. p. 261.

With regard to the origin of the Varangian Guard, the most distinct testimony is that of Ordericus Vitalis, who says, "When therefore the English had lost their liberty, they turned themselves with zeal to discover the means of throwing off the unaccustomed yoke. Some fled to Sueno, King of the Danes, to excite him to the recovery of the inheritance of his grandfather, Canute. Not a few fled into exile in other regions, either from the mere desire of escaping from under the Norman rule, or in the hope of acquiring wealth, and so being one day in a condition to renew the struggle at home. Some of these, In the bloom of youth, penetrated into a far distant land, and offered themselves to the military service of the Constantinopolitan Emperor – that wise prince, against whom Robert Guiscard, Duke of Apulia, had then raised all his forces. The English exiles were favourably received, and opposed in battle to the Normans, for whose encounter the Greeks themselves were too weak. Alexius began to build a town for the English, a little above Constantinople, at a place called *Chevelot*, but the trouble of the Normans from Sicily still increasing, he soon recalled them to the capital, and intrusted the principal palace with all its treasures to their keeping. This was the method in which the Saxon English found their way to Ionia, where they still remain, highly valued by the Emperor and the people." – Book IV. p. 508.

## Chapter III

*Here, youth, thy foot unbrace,  
Here, youth, thy brow imbraid,  
Each tribute that may grace  
The threshold here be paid.  
Walk with the stealthy pace  
Which Nature teaches deer,  
When, echoing, in the chase,  
The hunter's horn they hear.*

### ***The Court.***

Before entering, Achilles Tatius made various gesticulations, which were imitated roughly and awkwardly by the unpractised Varangian, whose service with his corps had been almost entirely in the field, his routine of duty not having, till very lately, called him to serve as one of the garrison of Constantinople. He was not, therefore, acquainted with the minute observances which the Greeks, who were the most formal and ceremonious soldiers and courtiers in the world, rendered not merely to the Greek Emperor in person, but throughout the sphere which peculiarly partook of his influence.

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

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

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

Each sentinel sunk his weapon.

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

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

"This," he whispered to Hereward, "is called the Bridge of Peril, and it is said that it has been occasionally smeared with oil, or strewed with dried peas, and that the bodies of men, known to have been in company with the Emperor's most sacred person, have been taken out of the Golden Horn,<sup>11</sup> into which the moat empties itself."

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

"Hush, rash and regardless of your life!" said Achilles Tatius; "to awaken the daughter of the imperial arch,<sup>12</sup> is to incur deep penalty at all times; but when a rash delinquent has disturbed her

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<sup>11</sup> The harbour of Constantinople.

<sup>12</sup> The daughter of the arch was a courtly expression for the echo, as we find explained by the courtly commander himself.

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

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

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

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

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

The expert navigator of the intricacies of the imperial residence, carried the Varangian through two or three small complicated courts, forming a part of the extensive Palace of the Blaquernal,<sup>13</sup> and entered the building itself by a side-door – watched in like manner by a sentinel of the Varangian Guard, whom they passed on being recognised. In the next apartment was stationed the Court of Guard, where were certain soldiers of the same corps amusing themselves at games somewhat resembling the modern draughts and dice, while they seasoned their pastime with frequent applications to deep flagons of ale, which were furnished to them while passing away their hours of duty. Some glances passed between Hereward and his comrades, and he would have joined them, or at least spoke to them; for, since the adventure of the Mitylenian, Hereward had rather thought himself annoyed than distinguished by his moonlight ramble in the company of his commander, excepting always the short and interesting period during which he conceived they were on the way to fight a duel. Still, however negligent in the strict observance of the ceremonies of the sacred palace, the Varangians had, in their own way, rigid notions of calculating their military duty; in consequence of which Hereward, without speaking to his companions, followed his leader through the guardroom, and one or two antechambers adjacent, the splendid and luxurious furniture of which convinced him that he could be nowhere else save in the sacred residence of his master the Emperor.

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<sup>13</sup> This palace derived its name from the neighbouring *Blachernian* Gate and Bridge,

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

After making their way through several apartments, empty or thus occupied, they at length entered one of black marble, or some other dark-coloured stone, much loftier and longer than the rest. Side passages opened into it, so far as the islander could discern, descending from several portals in the wall; but as the oils and gums with which the lamps in these passages were fed diffused a dim vapour around, it was difficult to ascertain, from the imperfect light, either the shape of the hall, or the style of its architecture. At the upper and lower ends of the chamber, there was a stronger and clearer light. It was when they were in the middle of this huge and long apartment, that Achilles said to the soldier, in the sort of cautionary whisper which he appeared to have substituted in place of his natural voice since he had crossed the Bridge of Peril —

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

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

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

"I have done nothing," he thought, "to merit being immured in one of these subterranean dens. Surely, though my captain, Achilles Tatius, is, under favour, little better than an ass, he cannot be so false of word as to train me to prison under false pretenses? I trow he shall first see for the last time how the English axe plays, if such is to be the sport of the evening. But let us see the upper end of this enormous vault; it may bear a better omen."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Keep it then; but remember thou dash it not about according to thy custom, nor bellow, nor shout, nor cry as in a battle-field; think of the sacred character of the place, which exaggerates riot into blasphemy, and remember the persons whom thou mayst chance to see, an offence to some of whom, it may be, ranks in the same sense with blasphemy against Heaven itself."

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

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

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

The first, which strictly resembled her own chair in size and convenience, was one designed for her husband, Nicephorus Briennius. He was said to entertain or affect the greatest respect for his

wife's erudition, though the courtiers were of opinion he would have liked to absent himself from her evening parties more frequently than was particularly agreeable to the Princess Anna and her imperial parents. This was partly explained by the private tattle of the court, which averred that the Princess Anna Comnena had been more beautiful when she was less learned; and that, though still a fine woman, she had somewhat lost the charms of her person as she became enriched in her mind.

To atone for the lowly fashion of the seat of Nicephorus Briennius, it was placed as near to his princess as it could possibly be edged by the ushers, so that she might not lose one look of her handsome spouse, nor he the least particle of wisdom which might drop from the lips of his erudite consort.

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

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

Beneath these elevated seats there sat, or reposed on the floor of the hall, such favourites as were admitted. The patriarch Zosimus, and one or two old men, were permitted the use of certain lowly stools, which were the only seats prepared for the learned members of the Princess's evening parties, as they would have been called in our days. As for the younger magnates, the honour of being permitted to join the imperial conversation was expected to render them far superior to the paltry accommodation of a joint stool. Five or six courtiers, of different dress and ages, might compose the party, who either stood, or relieved their posture by kneeling, along the verge of an adorned fountain, which shed a mist of such very small rain as to dispel almost insensibly, cooling the fragrant breeze which breathed from the flowers and shrubs, that were so disposed as to send a waste of sweets around. One goodly old man, named Michael Agelastes, big, burly, and dressed like an ancient Cynic philosopher, was distinguished by assuming, in a great measure, the ragged garb and mad bearing of that sect, and by his inflexible practice of the strictest ceremonies exigible by the Imperial family. He was known by an affectation of cynical principle and language, and of republican philosophy, strangely contradicted by his practical deference to the great. It was wonderful how long this man, now sixty years old and upwards, disdained to avail himself of the accustomed privilege of leaning, or supporting his limbs, and with what regularity he maintained either the standing posture or that

of absolute kneeling; but the first was so much his usual attitude, that he acquired among his court friends the name of Elephas, or the Elephant, because the ancients had an idea that the half-reasoning animal, as it is called, has joints incapable of kneeling down.

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

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

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

Some astonishment followed the abrupt entrance of the new comers. Achilles indeed glided into the presence with the easy and quiet extremity of respect which intimated his habitude in these regions. But Hereward started on his entrance, and perceiving himself in company of the court, hastily strove to remedy his disorder. His commander, throwing round a scarce visible shrug of apology, made then a confidential and monitory sign to Hereward to mind his conduct. What he meant was, that he should doff his helmet and fall prostrate on the ground. But the Anglo-Saxon, unaccustomed to interpret obscure inferences, naturally thought of his military duties, and advanced in front of the Emperor, as when he rendered his military homage. He made reverence with his knee, half touched his cap, and then recovering and shouldering his axe, stood in advance of the imperial chair, as if on duty as a sentinel.

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

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

After a troubled glance around, his look rested on Achilles Tatius. "Why here," he said, "trusty Follower? why this soldier here at this time of night?" Here, of course, was the moment for modelling the visages, *regis ad exemplum*; but, ere the Patriarch could frame his countenance into devout apprehension of danger, Achilles Tatius had spoken a word or two, which reminded Alexius' memory that the soldier had been brought there by his own special orders. "Oh, ay I true, good fellow," said he,

smoothing his troubled brow; "we had forgot that passage among the cares of state." He then spoke to the Varangian with a countenance more frank, and a heartier accent, than he used to his courtiers; for, to a despotic monarch, a faithful life-guardsman is a person of confidence, while an officer of high rank is always in some degree a subject of distrust. "Ha!" said he, "our worthy Anglo-Dane, how fares he?" This unceremonious salutation surprised all but him to whom it was addressed. Hereward answered, accompanying his words with a military obeisance which partook of heartiness rather than reverence, with a loud unsubdued voice, which startled the presence still more that the language was Saxon, which these foreigners occasionally used, "*Woes hael, Kaisar mirrig und machtigh!*" – that is, Be of good health, stout and mighty Emperor. The Emperor, with a smile of intelligence, to show he could speak to his guards in their own foreign language, replied, by the well-known counter-signal – "*Drink hael!*"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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