



***FELIX
DAHN***

***THE SCARLET
BANNER***

Felix Dahn

The Scarlet Banner

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By FELIX DAHN Author of " The Scarlet Banner "

A. C. McClURG & CO., Publishers , Chicago

A CAPTIVE OF THE ROMAN EAGLES

By FELIX DAHN Author of " Felicitas "

A. C. McClURG & CO., Publishers , Chicago

PREFACE

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This story, published in Germany under the title of *Gelimer* is the third volume in the group of romances to which "Felicitas" and "The Captive of the Roman Eagles" belong, and, like them, deals with the long-continued conflict between the Germans and the Romans.

But in the present novel the scene of the struggle is transferred from the forests of Germania to the arid sands of Africa, and, in wonderfully vivid pen-pictures, the author displays the marvellous magnificence surrounding the descendants of the Vandal Genseric, the superb pageants of their festivals, and the luxury whose enervating influence has gradually sapped the strength and courage of the rude, invincible warriors--once the terror of all the neighboring coasts and islands--till their enfeebled limbs can no longer support the weight of their ancestors' armor, and they cast aside their helmets to crown themselves with the rose-garlands of Roman revellers.

The pages glow with color as the brilliant changeeful vision of life in Carthage, under the Vandal rule, rises from the mists of the vanished centuries, and the characters which people this ancient world are no less varied. The noble king, the subtle Roman, Verus, the gallant warrior, Zazo, Hilda, the beautiful, fearless Ostrogoth Princess, the wily Justinian, his unscrupulous Empress, Theodora, and their brave, impetuous general, Belisarius, are clearly portrayed; and, underlying the whole drama, surges the fierce warfare between Roman Catholic and Arian, while the

place and the period in which the scenes of the romance are laid, both comparatively little known, lend a peculiar charm and freshness to the gifted author's narrative.

MARY J. SAFFORD.

Highfield Cottage,
Douglas Hill, Maine,
August 24, 1903.

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BOOK ONE

BEFORE THE WAR

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CHAPTER I

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To Cornelius Cethegus Cæsarius, a Friend:

I send these notes to you rather than to any other man. Why? First of all, because I know not where you are, so the missive will probably be lost. Doubtless that would be the best thing which could happen, especially for the man who would then be spared reading these pages! But it will also be well for me that these lines should lie--or be lost--in some other place than here. For here in Constantinople they may fall into certain dainty little well-kept hands, which possibly might gracefully wave an order to cut off my head--or some other useful portion of my anatomy to which I have been accustomed since my birth. But if I send these truths hence to the West, they will not be so easily seized by those dangerous little fingers which discover every secret in the capital, whenever they search in earnest. Whether you are living in your house at the foot of the Capitol, or with the Regent at Ravenna, I do not know; but I shall despatch this to Rome, for toward Rome my thoughts fly, seeking Cethegus.

You may ask derisively why I write what is so dangerous. Because I must! I praise--constrained by fear--so many people and things with my lips that I condemn in my heart, that I must at least confess the truth secretly in writing. Well, I might write out my rage, read it, and then throw the pages into the sea, you say. But--and this is the other reason for this missive--I am vain, too. The cleverest man I know must read, must praise what I write, must be aware that I

was not so foolish as to believe all I extolled to be praiseworthy. Later perhaps I can use the notes,--if they are not lost,--when at some future day I write the true history of the strange things I have experienced and shortly shall undergo.

So keep these pages if they do reach you. They are not exactly letters; it is a sort of diary that I am sending to you. I shall expect no answer. Cethegus does not need me, at present. Why should Cethegus write to me, now? Yet perhaps I shall soon learn your opinion from your own lips. Do you marvel?

True, we have not met since we studied together at Athens. But possibly I may soon seek you in your Italy. For I believe that the war declared to-day against the Vandals is but the prelude to the conflict with your tyrants, the Ostrogoths. Now I have written the great secret which at present is known to so few.

It is a strange thing to see before one, in clear, sharp letters, a terrible fate, pregnant with blood and tears, which no one else suspects; at such times the statesman feels akin to the god who is forging the thunderbolt that will so soon strike happy human beings. Pitiable, weak, mortal god! Will your bolt hit the mark? Will it not recoil against you? The demi-god Justinian and the goddess Theodora have prepared this thunder-bolt; the eagle Belisarius will carry it; we are starting for Africa to make war upon the Vandals.

Now you know much, O Cethegus. But you do not yet know all,--at least, not all about the Vandals. So learn it from me; I know. During the last few months I have been obliged to deliver lectures to the two gods--and the eagle--about

these fair-haired fools. But whoever is compelled to deliver lectures has sense enough bestowed upon him to perform the task. Look at the professors at Athens. Since the reign of Justinian the lecture-rooms have been closed to them. Who still thinks them wise?

So listen: The Vandals are cousins of your dear masters, the Ostrogoths. They came about a hundred years ago--men, women, and children, perhaps fifty thousand in number--from Spain to Africa. Their leader was a terrible king, Gizericus by name (commonly called Genseric); a worthy comrade of Attila, the Hun. He defeated the Romans in hard-fought battles, captured Carthage, plundered Rome. He was never vanquished. The crown passed to his heirs, the Asdings, who were said to be descended from the pagan gods of the Germans. The oldest male scion of the family always ascends the throne.

But Genseric's posterity inherited only his sceptre, not his greatness. The Catholics in their kingdom (the Vandals are heretics, Arians) were most cruelly persecuted, which was more stupid than it was unjust. It really was not so very unjust; they merely applied to the Catholics, the Romans, in their kingdom the selfsame laws which the Emperor in the Roman Empire had previously issued against the Arians. But it was certainly extremely stupid. What harm can the few Arians do in the Roman Empire? But the numerous Catholics in the Vandal kingdom could overthrow it, if they should rebel. True; they will not rise voluntarily. But we are coming to rouse them.

Shall we conquer? There is much probability of it. King Hilderic lived in Constantinople a long time, and is said to

have secretly embraced the Catholic faith. He is Justinian's friend: this great-grandson of Genseric abhors war. He has dealt his own kingdom the severest blow by transforming its best prop, the friendship with the Ostrogoths in Italy, into mortal hatred. The wise King Theodoric at Ravenna made a treaty of friendship and brotherhood with Thrasamund, the predecessor of Hilderic, gave him his beautiful, clever sister, Amalafrida, for his wife, and bestowed upon the latter for her dowry, besides much treasure, the headland of Lilybæum in Sicily, directly opposite Carthage, which was of great importance to the Vandal kingdom. He also sent him as a permanent defence against the Moors--probably against us too--a band of one thousand chosen Gothic warriors, each of whom had five brave men under him. Hilderic was scarcely king when the royal widow Amalafrida was accused of high treason against him and threatened with death.

If Justinian and Theodora did not invent this high treason, I have little knowledge of my adored rulers: I saw the smile with which they received the news from Carthage. It was the triumph of the bird-catcher who draws his snare over the fluttering prey.

Amalafrida's Goths succeeded in rescuing her from imprisonment and accompanying her on her flight. She intended to seek refuge with friendly Moors, but on her way she was overtaken and attacked by the King's two nephews with a superior force. The faithful Goths fought and fell almost to a man; the Queen was captured and murdered in prison. Since that time fierce hate has existed between the two nations; the Goths took Lilybæum back and from it cast

vengeful glances at Carthage. This is King Hilderic's sole act of government! Since that time he has seen clearly that it will be best for his people to be subject to us. But he is almost an old man, and his cousin--unfortunately the rightful heir to the throne--is our worst enemy. His name is Gelimer. He must never be permitted to reign in Carthage; for he is considered the stronghold and hero, nay, the soul of the Vandal power. He first defeated the natives, the Moors, those sons of the desert who had always proved superior to the weak descendants of Genseric.

But this Gelimer--it is impossible for me to obtain from the contradictory reports a satisfactory idea of him. Or could a German really possess such contradictions of mind and character? They are all mere children, though six and a half feet tall; giants, with the souls of boys. Nearly all of them have a single trait,--the love of carousing. Yet this Gelimer--well, we shall see.

Widely varying opinions of the entire Vandal nation are held here. According to some they are terrible foes in battle, like all Germans, and as Genseric's men undoubtedly were. But, from other reports, in the course of three generations under the burning sun of Africa, and especially from living among our provincials there--the most corrupt rabble who ever disgraced the Roman name--they have become effeminate, degenerate. The hero Belisarius of course despises this foe, like every other whom he knows and does not know.

The gods have intrusted to me the secret correspondence which is to secure success. I am now expecting important news from numerous Moorish chiefs;

from the Vandal Governor of Sardinia; from your Ostrogothic Count in Sicily; from the richest, most influential senator in Tripolis; nay, even from one of the highest ecclesiastics--it is hard to believe--of the heretical church itself. The latter was a masterpiece. Of course he is not a Vandal, but a Roman! No matter! An Arian priest in league with us. I attribute it to our rulers. You know how I condemn their government of our empire; but where the highest statecraft is at stake,--that is, to win traitors in the closest councils of other sovereigns and thus outwit the most cunning, there I bow the knee admiringly to these gods of intrigue. If only--

A letter from Belisarius summons me to the Golden House: "Bad news from Africa! The war is again extremely doubtful. The apparent traitors there betrayed Justinian, not the Vandals. This comes from such false wiles. Help, counsel me! Belisarius."

How? I thought the secret letters from Carthage were to come, by disguised messengers, only to me? And through me to the Emperor? That was his express order; I read it myself. Yet still more secret ones arrive, whose contents I learn only by chance? This is your work, O Demonodora!

CHAPTER II

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The Carthage of the Vandals was still a stately, brilliant city, still the superb "Colonia Julia Carthago" which Augustus had erected according to the great Cæsar's plan in the place of the ancient city destroyed by Scipio. True, it was no longer--as it had been a century before--next to Rome and Constantinople the most populous city in the empire, but it had suffered little in the external appearance and splendor of its buildings; only the walls, by which it had been encircled as a defence against Genseric, were partially destroyed in the assault by the Vandals, and not sufficiently restored,--an indication of arrogant security or careless indolence.

The ancient citadel, the Phœnician "Byrsa," now called the Capitol, still overlooked the blue sea and the harbor, doubly protected by towers and iron chains. In the squares and the broad streets of the "upper city," a motley throng surged or lounged upon the steps of Christian basilicas (which were often built out of pagan temples), around the Amphitheatre, the colonnades, the baths with their beds of flowers and groups of palms, kept green and luxuriant by the water brought from long distances over the stately arches of the aqueduct. The "lower city," built along the sea, was inhabited by the poorer people, principally harbor workmen, and was filled with shops and storehouses containing supplies for ships and sailors. The streets were narrow, all running from south to north, from the inner city to the harbor, like the alleys of modern Genoa.

The largest square in the lower city was the forum of St. Cyprian, named, for the magnificent basilica dedicated to this the most famous saint in Africa. The church occupied the whole southern side of the square, from whose northern portion a long flight of marble steps led to the harbor (even at the present day, amid the solitude and desolation of the site of noisy, populous Carthage, the huge ruins of the old sea gate still remain), while a broad street led westward to the suburb of Aklas and the Numidian Gate, and another in the southeast rose somewhat steeply to the upper city and the Capitol.

Into this great square one hot June evening a varied crowd was pouring from the western gate, the Porta Numidia,--Romans and provincials, citizens of Carthage, tradesmen and grocers, with many freedmen and slaves, moved by curiosity and delight in idleness, which attracted them to every brilliant, noisy spectacle. There were Vandals among them, too; men, women, and children, whose yellow or red hair and fair skins were in strong contrast to those of the rest of the population, though the complexions of many were somewhat bronzed by the African sun. In costume they differed from the Romans very slightly; many not at all. Among these lower classes numbers were of mixed blood, children of Vandal fathers who had married Carthaginian women. Here and there in the concourse appeared a Moor, who had come from the border of the desert to the capital to sell ivory or ostrich feathers, lion and tiger skins, or antelope horns. The men and women of noble German blood were better--that is, more eager, wealthy, and lavish--buyers than the numerous impoverished Roman senatorial families,

whose once boundless wealth the government had confiscated for real or alleged high treason, or for persistent adherence to the Catholic faith. Not even a single Roman of the better class was to be seen in the noisy, shouting crowd; a priest of the orthodox religion, who on his way to a dying man could not avoid crossing the square, glided timidly into the nearest side street, fear, abhorrence, and indignation all written on his pallid face. For this exulting throng was celebrating a Vandal victory.

In front of the returning troops surged the dense masses of the Carthaginian populace, shouting, looking back, and often halting with loud acclamations. Many pressed around the Vandal warriors, begging for gifts. The latter were all mounted, many on fine, really noble steeds, descendants of the famous breed brought from Spain and crossed with the native horses. The westering sun streamed through the wide-open West Gate along the Numidian Way; the stately squadrons glittered and flashed in the vivid light which was dazzlingly reflected from the white sandy soil and the white houses. Richly, almost too brilliantly, gold and silver glittered on helmets and shields, broad armlets, sword-hilts, and scabbards, even on the mountings which fastened the lance-heads to the shafts, and, in inlaid work, on the shafts themselves. In dress, armor, and ornaments upon rider and steed the most striking hues were evidently the most popular. Scarlet, the Vandal color, prevailed; this vivid light-red was used everywhere,--on the long, fluttering cloaks, the silken kerchiefs on the helmets, which fell over the neck and shoulders to protect them from the African sun, on the gayly painted, richly gilded quivers, and even on the

saddles and bridles of the horses. Among the skins which the desert animals furnished in great variety, the favorites were the spotted antelope, the dappled leopard, the striped tiger, while from the helmets nodded and waved the red plumage of the flamingo and the white feathers of the ostrich. The procession closed with several captured camels, laden with foemen's weapons, and about a hundred Moorish prisoners, men and women, who, with hands tied behind their backs, clad only in brown and white striped mantles, marched, bareheaded and barefooted, beside the towering beasts, driven forward, like them, by blows from the spears of their mounted guards.

On the steps of the basilica and the broad top of the wall of the harbor stairs, the throng of spectators was unusually dense; here people could comfortably watch the glittering train without danger from the fiery steeds.

"Who is yonder youth, the fair one?" asked a middle-aged man, with the dress and bearing of a sailor, pointing over the parapet as he turned to a gray-haired old citizen.

"Which do you mean, friend Hegelochus? They are almost all fair."

"Indeed? Well, this is the first time I have been among the Vandals! My ship dropped anchor only a few hours ago. You must show and explain everything. I mean the one yonder on the white stallion; he is carrying the narrow red banner with the golden dragon."

"Oh, that is Gibamund, 'the handsomest of the Vandals,' as the women call him. Do you see how he looks up at the windows of the palace near the Capitol? Among all the crowd gazing down from there he seeks but one."

"But"--the speaker suddenly started--"who is the other at his right,--the one on the dun horse? I almost shrank when I met his eye. He looks like the youth, only he is much older. Who is *he*?"

"That is his brother Gelimer; God bless his noble head!"

"Aha, so he is the hero of the day? I have often heard his name at home in Syracuse. So he is the conqueror of the Moors?"

"Yes, he has defeated them again, the Gorms. Do you hear how the Carthaginians are cheering him? We citizens, too, must thank him for having driven the robbers away from our villages and fields back to their deserts."

"I suppose he is fifty years old? His hair is very gray."

"He is not yet forty!"

"Just look, Eugenius! He has sprung from his horse. What is he doing?"

"Didn't you see? A child, a Roman boy, fell while trying to run in front of his charger. He lifted him up, and is seeking to find out whether he was hurt."

"The child wasn't harmed; it is smiling at him and seizing his glittering necklet. There--he is unfastening the chain and putting it into the little fellow's hands. He kisses him and gives him back to his mother. Hark, how the crowd is cheering him! Now he has leaped back into the saddle. He knows how to win favor."

"There you wrong him. It is his nature. He would have done the same where no eye beheld him. And he need not win the favor of the people: he has long possessed it."

"Among the Vandals?"

"Among the Romans, too; that is, the middle and lower classes. The senators, it is true, are different! Those who still live in Africa hate all who bear the name of Vandal; they have good reason for it, too. But Gelimer has a heart to feel for us; he helps wherever he can, and often opposes his own people; they are almost all violent, prone to sudden anger, and in their rage savagely cruel. I above all others have cause to thank him."

"You? Why?"

"You saw Eugenia, my daughter, before we left our house?"

"Certainly. Into what a lovely girl the frail child whom you brought from Syracuse a few years ago has blossomed!"

"I owe her life, her honor, to Gelimer. Thrasaric, the giant, the most turbulent of all the nobles, snatched her from my side here in the open street at noonday, and carried the shrieking girl away in his arms. I could not follow as swiftly as he ran. Gelimer, attracted by our screams, rushed up, and, as the savage would not release her, struck him down with a single blow and gave my terrified child back to me."

"And the ravisher?"

"He rose, laughed, shook himself, and said to Gelimer: 'You did right, Asding, and your fist is heavy.' And then since--"

"Well? You hesitate."

"Yes, just think of it; since then the Vandal, as he could not gain her by force, is suing modestly for my daughter's hand. He, the richest noble of his nation, wishes to become my son-in-law."

"Why, that is no bad outlook."

"Princess Hilda, my girl's patroness--she often sends for the child to come to her at the Capitol and pays liberally for her embroideries--Princess Hilda herself speaks in his behalf. But I hesitate; I will not force her on any account."

"Well, what does she say?"

"Oh, the Barbarian is as handsome as a picture. I almost believe--I fear--she likes him. But something holds her back. Who can read a girl's heart? Look, the leaders of the horsemen are dismounting--Gelimer too--in front of the basilica."

"Strange. He is the hero,--the square echoes with his name,--and he looks so grave, so sad."

"Yes, there again! But did you see how kindly his eyes shone as he soothed the frightened child?"

"Certainly I did. And now--"

"Yes, there it is; a black cloud suddenly seems to fall upon him. There are all sorts of rumors about it among the people. Some say he has a demon; others that he is often out of his mind. Our priests whisper that it is pangs of conscience for secret crimes. But I will never believe that of Gelimer."

"Was he always so?"

"It has grown worse within a few years. Satanas--Saint Cyprian protect us--is said to have appeared to him in the solitude of the desert. Since that time he has been even more devout than before. See, his most intimate friend is greeting him at the basilica."

"Yonder priest? He is an Arian; I know it by the oblong, narrow tonsure."

"Yes," replied the Carthaginian, wrathfully, "it is Verus, the archdeacon! Curses on the traitor!" He clinched his fists.

"Traitor! Why?"

"Well--renegade. He descends from an ancient Roman senatorial family which has given the Church many a bishop. His great-uncle was Bishop Laetus of Nepte, who died a martyr. But his father, his mother, and seven brothers and sisters died under a former king amid the most cruel tortures, rather than abjure their holy Catholic religion. This man, too,--he was then a youth of twenty,--was tortured until he fell as if dead. When he recovered consciousness, he abjured his faith and became an Arian, a priest,--the wretch!--to buy his life. Soon--for Satan has bestowed great intellectual gifts upon him--he rose from step to step, became the favorite of the Asdings, of the court, suddenly even the friend of the noble Gelimer, who had long kept him coldly and contemptuously at a distance. And the court gave him this basilica, our highest sanctuary, dedicated to the great Cyprian, which, like almost all the churches in Carthage, the heretics have wrested from us."

"But look--what is the hero doing? He is kneeling on the upper step of the church. Now he is taking off his helmet."

"He is scattering the dust of the marble stairs upon his head."

"What is he kissing? The priest's hand?"

"No, the case containing the ashes of the great saint. He is very devout and very humble. Or shall I say he humiliates himself? He shuts himself up for days with the monks to do penance by scourging."

"A strange hero of Barbarian blood!"

"The hero blood shows itself in the heat of battle. He is rising. Do you see how his helmet--now he is putting it on again--is hacked by fresh blows? One of the two black vulture wings on the crest is cut through. The strangest thing is,--this warrior is also a bookworm, a delver into mystic lore; he has attended the lectures of Athenian philosophers. He is a theologian and--"

"A player on the lyre, too, apparently! See, a Vandal has handed him a small one."

"That is a harp, as they call it."

"Hark, he is touching the strings! He is singing. I can't understand."

"It is the Vandal tongue."

"He has finished. How his Germans shout! They are striking their spears on their shields. Now he is descending the steps. What? Without entering the church, as the others did?"

"Yes, I remember! He vowed, when he shed blood, to shun the saint's threshold for three days. Now the horsemen are all mounting again."

"But where are the foot soldiers?"

"Yes, that is bad--I mean for the Vandals. They have none, or scarcely any: they have grown not only so proud, but so effeminate and lazy that they disdain to serve on foot. Only the very poorest and lowest of the population will do it. Most of the foot soldiers are Moorish mercenaries, obtained for each campaign from friendly tribes."

"Ah, yes, I see Moors among the soldiers."

"Those are men from the Papua mountain. They plundered our frontiers for a long time. Gelimer attacked

their camp and captured their chief Antalla's three daughters, whom he returned unharmed, without ransom. Then Antalla invited the Asding to his tent to thank him; they concluded a friendship of hospitality,--the most sacred bond to the Moors,--and since then they have rendered faithful service even against other Moors. The parade is over. See, the ranks are breaking. The leaders are going to the Capitol to convey to King Hilderic the report of the campaign and the booty. Look, the crowd is dispersing. Let us go too. Come back to my house; Eugenia is waiting to serve the evening meal. Come, Hegelochus."

"I am ready, most friendly host. I fear I may burden you a long time. Business with the corn-dealers is slow."

"Why are you stopping? What are you looking at?"

"I'm coming. Only I must see this Gelimer's face once more. I shall never forget those features, and all the strange, contradictory things which you have told me about him."

"That is the way with most people. He is mysterious, incomprehensible,--'daimonios,' as the Greeks say. Let us go now! Here! To the left--down the steps."

CHAPTER III

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High above, on the Capitolium of the city, towered the Palatium, the royal residence of the Asdings; not a single dwelling, but a whole group of buildings. Originally planned as an acropolis, a fortress to rule the lower city and afford a view over both harbors across the sea, the encircling structures had been but slightly changed by Genseric and his successors; the palace remained a citadel and was well suited to hold the Carthaginians in check. A narrow ascent led up from the quay to a small gateway enclosed between solid walls and surmounted by a tower. This gateway opened into a large square resembling a courtyard, inclosed on all sides by the buildings belonging to the palace; the northern one, facing the sea, was occupied by the King's House, where the ruler himself lived with his family. The cellars extended deep into the rocks; they had often been used as dungeons, especially for state criminals. On the eastern side of the King's House, separated from it only by a narrow space, was the Princes' House, and opposite to this, the arsenal; the southern side, sloping toward the city, was closed by the fortress wall, its gateway and tower.

The handsomest room on the ground-floor of the Princes' House was a splendidly decorated, pillared hall. In the centre, on a table of citrus wood, stood a tall, richly gilded jug with handles, and several goblets of different forms; the dark-red wine exhaled a strong fragrance. A couch, covered with a zebra skin, was beside it, on which, clinging together in the most tender embrace, sat "the handsomest of the

Vandals" and a no less beautiful young woman. The youth had laid aside his helmet, adorned with the silvery wing-feathers of the white heron; his long locks fell in waves upon his shoulders and mingled with the light golden hair of his young wife, who was eagerly trying to unclasp the heavy breast-plate; at last she let it fall clanking beside the helmet and sword-belt upon the marble floor. Then, gazing lovingly at his noble face, she stroked back, with both soft hands, the clustering locks that curled around his temples, looking radiantly into his merry, laughing eyes.

"Do I really have you with me once more? Do I hold you in my embrace?" she said in a low, tender tone, putting both arms on his shoulders and clasping her hands on his neck.

"Oh, my sweet one!" cried the warrior, snatching her to his heart and covering eyes, cheeks, and pouting lips with ardent kisses. "Oh, Hilda, my joy, my wife! How I longed for you--night and day--always!"

"It is almost forty days," she sighed.

"Quite forty. Ah, how long they seemed to me!"

"Oh, it was far easier for you! To be ever on the move with your brother, your comrades, to ride swiftly and fight gayly in the land of the foe. While I--I was forced to sit here in the women's rooms; to sit and weave and wait inactive! Oh, if I could only have been there too! To dash onward by your side upon a fiery horse, ride, fight, and at last--fall, with you. After a hero's life--a hero's death!"

She started up; her gray-blue eyes flashed with a wonderful light, and tossing back her waving hair she raised both arms enthusiastically.

Her husband gently drew her down again. "My high-hearted wife, my Hilda," he said, smiling, "with the instinct of a seer your ancestor chose for you the name of the glorious leader of the Valkyries. How much I owe old Hildebrand, the master at arms of the great King of the Goths! With the name the nature came to you. And his training and teaching probably did the rest."

Hilda nodded. "I scarcely knew my parents, they died so young. Ever since I could remember I was under the charge and protection of the white-bearded hero. In the palace at Ravenna he locked me in his apartments, keeping me jealously away from the pious Sisters, the nuns, and from the priests who educated my playmates,--among them the beautiful Mataswintha. I grew up with his other foster-child, dark-haired Teja. My friend Teja taught me to play the harp, but also to hurl spears and catch them on the shield. Later, when the king, and still more his daughter, the learned Amalaswintha, insisted that I must study with the women and the priests, how sullenly,"--she smiled at the remembrance,--"how angrily the old great-grandfather questioned me in the evening about what the nuns had taught me during the day! If I had recited the proverbs and Latin hymns, the *Deus pater ingenite* or *Salve sancta parens* by Sedulius--I scarcely knew more than the beginning!"--she laughed merrily--"he shook his massive head, muttered something in his long white beard, and cried: 'Come, Hilda! Let's get out of doors. Come on the sea. There I will tell you about the ancient gods and heroes of our people.' Then he took me far, far from the crowded harbors into the solitude of a desolate, savage island, where the gulls circled and the

wild swan built her nest amid the rushes; there we sat down on the sand, and, while the foaming waves rolled close to our feet, he told me tales of the past. And what tales old Hildebrand could tell! My eyes rested intently on his lips as, with my elbows propped on his knee, I gazed into his face. How his sea-gray eyes sparkled! how his white hair fluttered in the evening breeze! His voice trembled with enthusiasm; he no longer knew where he was; he saw everything he related, or often--in disconnected words--sang. When the tale ended, he waked as if from a dream, started up and laughed, stroking my head: 'There! There! Now I've once more blown those saints, with their dull, mawkish gentleness, out of your soul, as the north wind, sweeping through the church windows, drives out the smoke of the incense.' But they had taken no firm hold," she added, smiling.

"And so you grew up half a pagan, as Gelimer says," replied her husband, raising his finger warningly, "but as a full heroine, who believes in nothing so entirely as the glory of her people."

"And in yours--and in your love," Hilda murmured tenderly, kissing him on the forehead. "Yet it is true," she added, "if you Vandals had not been the nearest kinsfolk of my Goths, I don't know whether I should have loved you--ah, no; I *must* have loved you--when, sent by Gelimer, you came to woo me. But as it is, to see you was to love you. I owe all my happiness to Gelimer! I will always remember it: it shall bind me to him when otherwise," she added slowly and thoughtfully, "many things might repel me."

"My brother desired, by this marriage, to end the hostility, bridge the gulf which had separated the two kingdoms since--since that bloody deed of Hilderic. It did not succeed! He united only us, not our nations. He is full of heavy cares and gloomy thoughts."

"Yes. I often think he must be ill," said Hilda, shaking her head.

"He?--The strongest hero in our army! He alone--not even Brother Zazo--can bend my outstretched sword-arm."

"Not ill in body,--soul-sick! But hush! Here he comes. See how sorrowful, how gloomy he looks. Is that the brow, the face, of a conqueror?"

CHAPTER IV

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A tall figure appeared in the colonnade leading from the interior of the dwelling to the open doorway of the hall.

This man without helmet, breastplate, or sword-belt wore a tight-fitting dark-gray robe, destitute of color or ornament. He often paused in his slow advance as if lost in meditation, with hands clasped behind his back; his head drooped forward a little, as though burdened by anxious thought. His lofty brow was deeply furrowed; his light-brown hair and beard were thickly sprinkled with gray, which formed a strange contrast to his otherwise youthful appearance. His eyes were fixed steadily on the floor,--their color and expression were still unrecognizable,--and pausing again under the pillared arch of the entrance, he sighed heavily.

"Hail, Gelimer, victorious hero!" cried the young wife, joyously. "Take what I have had ready for you ever since your return home was announced to-day." Seizing a thick laurel wreath lying on the table before her, she eagerly raised it. A slight but expressive wave of the hand stopped her.

"Wreaths are not suited for the sinner's head," said the new-comer in a low tone, "but ashes, ashes!"

Hilda, hurt and sorrowful, laid down the garland.

"Sinner?" cried her husband, indignantly. "Why, yes; so are we all--in the eyes of the saints. But you less than others. Are we never to rejoice?"

"Let those rejoice who can!"