

## FOR THE WHITE CHRIST

"Silence, woman! I have given heed long enough to your ill counsel; long enough have I, the king, turned a harsh face against my loyal liegemen, at the bidding of a woman. My folly has borne bitter fruit, — heart-burnings and strife. Go, hide your shame in the bower. Prepare yourself to live at peace with my high judge, else I —"

"Lord king!" protested Olvir, "is this time for harsh words? Listen, dear lord! Wisdom has come to me. I see how my own anger has brought my own sorrow. When, on the Garonne bank, I broke troth with the daughter of Rudulf, the outcome might have been far different had I curbed my tongue from scorn. If the maiden was at fault, my fault was the greater."

"O God!" moaned Fastrada, and she flung herself on the marble pavement.

But Karl did not look about from the serene face of the Northman.

"The Count Palatine has spoken," he said, gravely smiling.

"Would that it might so be!" answered Olvir, and his dark eyes grew dim.

"How then?" demanded Karl. But even as the words left his lips, the door-hangings parted, and Rothada darted across the room, blind to all else than her lover.

"Fly, hero!" she cried. "The courtyard swarms with the warriors; they come to take you! Fly! In the passage wait those who 'll lead you to freedom. Ah, Holy Mother! — too late!"

The passage without resounded with the tread and din of armed men jostling together in their haste. All eyes were fixed on the doorway as Gerold and Liutrad sprang into view. The Swabian paused at once, and stood hesitating, his face white and drawn with despair. But Liutrad strode across the room, tucking up his robe as he went.