

THE COOK AND THE CAPTIVE;
OR,
ATTALUS THE HOSTAGE.

BY CHARLOTTE M. YONGE.

CHAPTER V.—(Continued.)



AFTER drinking the guest-cup with him, Gregory prayed to be excused, and that Tetricus and Laurentius, the Consul, might be allowed to entertain them, while he prepared Attalus for the journey.

He took the boy with him into the ante-chapel. Attalus was weeping, and when he said, "My poor child!" exclaimed, "O, Sir Father! Baldrik would be glad to go."

"True, my son; but I have given my word to his father. He is not mine, nor have I a right over him."

Then with earnest words and tears Gregory entreated the boy to bear his duty to God in mind, to say his prayers, to keep from all evil, and bear insults and hardships patiently. At Treves, or wherever the court of Theudebert might be, he was sure to find a church and clergy, who would be friendly to him for his grandfather's sake, and he was to seek them out and follow their counsel. Gregory would do all that was possible to obtain his return, and with him were to go Gola, the old Moorish slave, who had always been as a nurse to him and would take charge of his clothes, and the younger Festus, who had the care of his mule.

So Gregory, hiding his tears, delivered the weeping boy up to Wolfram, who made oath, in the name of his master, that he should duly be restored, sound and unhurt.

All the household came out to see him start, the clergy of all ranks standing up with folded hands, while Bishop Gregory, choked with emotion, gave his solemn blessing; all the slaves, many of them weeping, for Attalus had been the pet of the house in spite of many a prank; Leo, still black with charcoal, with tears running down his face, loaded Festus with provisions and put a honey-cake into Attalus's hand, and last, of all, Gilchrist stumbled forth on his knees and cried, "God be with the boy! Remember holy Patrick's breastplate."

CHAPTER VI.—THE COUNCIL AT SOISSONS.

As far as Soissons, or Noviodunum, as he had learned to call it, Attalus did not fare ill. Wolfram and his men took little notice of him, and the two slaves kept near him. At night Wolfram called a halt near the edge of a great wood, where he sent his men to collect sticks so as to make a fire, to keep off the wolves that might be in the neighborhood, and struck a light with

a flint brought from the chalk country on the Seine. Some rabbits and partridges had been shot with arrows or pulled down by the dogs on the way, and these served for the food of the escort, with some wine which the Franks had required of the Langres people; and they sat carousing and shouting or singing over it, paying hardly any attention to their hostage, after Wolfram had shouted to him to lie down there, pointing to a great beech-tree, and not to stray farther.

Gola was in despair at his young master having to sleep out-of-doors, but Attalus somewhat haughtily told him that it was the duty of a Roman soldier. They had no lack of food, bread, smoked fish, cheese, dried grapes, and an earthenware bottle of wine; and the bed of beech leaves, raked together by Festus, was comfortable, so that, after lying awake a little while, looking up at the sky through the branches, and wondering what his fate would be, Attalus went to sleep, and did not wake till the camp was astir.

Again the troop went on, and in due time they reached Soissons, an old Roman town, where the fortifications still stood, and in the midst was the forum, or market-place, and the theatre, open to the sky and surrounded with galleries of seats. Large Roman houses, and small dens built on to their sides, stood all round. It had been made the capital of the Meerwing kings, and at this moment the helmets of Hildebert's men glanced within the open space of the forum, those of Theudebert in the theatre. The kings themselves lodged in the houses of the propretor and the legionary, for Noviodunum had been a grand old Roman town. It had a fine old church, once a basilica or hall of justice, and a train of priests and clergy was passing into it, a sight which made Attalus feel as if he had come to friends.

He was driven on, however, to the Roman house, where the once beautiful paved court was full of rude Franks, sitting on the ground, their horses tethered round them. They were feasting on the remnants of the meal that the chiefs had been eating within, sitting in groups, some gnawing bones, some, a little more dainty, grilling them over the fires that they had lighted on the ground with fragments of the once fine old woodwork, others drinking out of their helmets; all laughing, shouting, or bickering at the top of their voices, except one party, who sat listening to a harper chanting a lay of ancient heroism and bloodshed. Through all these various parties Wolfram made his way to the hall of the palace, where, under the fine old arches and mosaic ceiling, on the rich inlaid pavement, the table was spread, and the two long-haired kings, Hildebert and Theudebert, and their chiefs were carousing together out of finely chased silver cups, while the