

"Lady, I have great matters to announce to thee, if thou wilt deign to grant me secret speech."

Clotilde looked up quickly, and saw deep meaning in his face. "Surely," she thought, "this is no common beggar."

"Say on," she remarked, in the same cautious tone.

"Clovis, king of the Franks, has sent me to thee," said Aurelian. "If it be the will of God, he would fain raise thee to his high rank by marriage, and that thou mayst be satisfied that I am a true messenger, he sendeth thee this, his ring."

Clotilde joyfully took the ring, her heart beating high with hope and desire for revenge. Dismissing her attendants, she warmly thanked the messenger for his caution, and declared that nothing could give her greater joy than to be bride to Clovis, the great and valorous king who was bringing all the land of Gaul under his rule.

"Take in payment for thy pains these hundred sous in gold and this ring of mine," she said. "Return promptly to thy lord. If he would have my hand in marriage, let him send messengers without delay to demand me of my uncle Gondebaud; and bid him direct his messengers, as soon as they obtain permission, to take me away in haste. If they delay, I fear all will fail. Aridius, my uncle's counsellor, is on his way back from Constantinople. If he should arrive, and gain my uncle's ear, before I am gone, all will come to naught. Haste, then, and advise Clovis that there be no delay."

Aurelian was willing enough to comply with her request, but he met with obstacles on the way. Start-