

witha; "but I hope Aldewold is not given to the worship of Grim and Frey; I should like to live near a city."

"That comes of thy loving to talk to Atli and Milo and Leo, and all that mean slavish Roman crew. Thou wilt never be like a brave Frankish Frau, to make all afraid of her. Thou canst not even box the ears of a thrall who pulls thy hair—she laughs at thee!"

"I do not like to hurt any one," said Roswitha, as if she was ashamed of herself, and Valhild laughed.

"Yea, thou art a miserable coward, and no one will ever honor thee as Hunderik's daughter should be honored. I believe thou wouldst like nothing so well as to get shut up in one of those Roman houses which they call nunneries that Gilchrist talked of, where they do nothing but say their prayers all day long, and never eat flesh, nor go out, nor see a man."

"I am sure I do not want to see a man," said Roswitha; "they do nothing but order one about and beat one."

"That is because you are so poor and tame a creature," cried Valhild. "I should soon make my husband know better than to beat me."

"He is the stronger," sighed Roswitha.

"Not always," said Valhild; "and, even so, I should always be the craftier, and coax if I could not force."

"Ah! I had rather be out of the way of it all," said Roswitha; "I would fain be only with good women, and learn how to serve their holy God."

Poor little maidens, all they had to look forward to was the being bestowed, without will of their own, on the Frank whose offers best pleased their father, whether they liked it or not, or whether he were previously married or not. It was quite doubtful whether they would win his love; and even if they did succeed, it might be only for a time, and there was often poison or murder on the part of a rival. Only a strong, masterful, or unusually attractive and artful woman could hope to prevail, so mournful was the lot of her sex among the heathen and half-heathen Franks. No wonder that this festival was no joy to Roswitha, and that even Bernhild looked sadly at her daughters, and gave them counsel that would sound strange in the ears of a bride in these happier times, as to how to win their place in the household, and how to keep the husband's heart, and prevent themselves from being degraded.

She had not much hope for Roswitha, though the eldest, the prettiest, and the best cook, but wanting in spirit and too much inclined to the Christian teaching, which was thought to soften and weaken the will, and raise scruples which would have to be trodden down.

Roswitha longed to talk to Leo, whom she

had begun to regard as a wise counselor; but Leo was exceedingly busy over the preparations for the feast, and could hardly spare a moment from his compounding, roasting, boiling, and baking to speak to her; besides that, he was surrounded with a company of other slaves obeying his directions. She was soon called away, that both she and Valhild might be arrayed in their best garments, and have their long flaxen hair arranged to hang in silky folds over their shoulders to meet the party hourly expected.

All the banquet was ready, and Leo was able to go away to give out the portion to the various herdsmen, a matter which had lately become part of his business, since his master thought him unusually trustworthy and in his way economical.

The guests were near, and Hunderik was coming to his door to greet them. The two foremost were a sunburnt old man, whose cheeks were a darker russet brown than the once flowing, now whitened, heavy eyebrows and moustache and beard that almost hid them, and made his countenance like that of an old lion. Tall, slim, and active, but not yet at his full height or strength, his son came beside him, fair and handsome, and with a timidly happy look in his grey eyes which made Valhild pinch her sister and say, "There's a hero for one of us—may it be me! For I see he is dull, and will leave all to me."

Hunderik held out his hand in welcome, and called on his daughters each to present a cup of wine on dismounting to their two guests. Roswitha served the old man, Valhild the younger.

"Ha! fair-faced maids," cried Aldewold, "but younger than I thought for. Which of them is for our house, Hunderik?"

"We have not yet fixed our terms," returned Hunderik, "and it is ill to chaffer between a full man and a hungry one."

So the guests were conducted into the house, where along the central passage tables were arranged, and the usual profuse Frank banquet was served. Hunderik, as each dish appeared, extolled the extreme abilities and faithfulness of Leo, whom he had had the good luck to purchase, and who not only made meat a different thing from what he had ever known before except at a Roman table, but was the wisest of men in controlling the household and preventing waste, so that he had been put in charge of all the stores. "Far better to trust to than women folk, who were hard and gripping when angry, and over-soft where they loved."

Bernhild's brow might well grow dark, especially when Aldewold asked in a tone of banter, "Which, then, of the maidens took after her mother?"