

They did so, and then lay down to sleep as well as hunger and the chill of the stream would allow them.

CHAPTER XXV.

ST. REMI'S LAST CONQUEST.

In early dawn Leo awoke, and seeing a thick wood at a little distance called Attalus, thinking it better to hide there before it was light, since he saw tokens of habitation.

Aching and hungry Attalus complied, and they spent most of the day among the trees, making but little progress, and as the wood was fir, finding nothing to eat, except a few seeds picked, but with much trouble, from the cones. However, they discovered that it skirted a Roman road, which, no doubt, led directly to Rheims, and a milestone told them how many stadia they had yet to go—a weary reckoning to the exhausted, famished boy.

Nor durst they proceed along it by day, for they heard passengers on it at times, and when night came, though they could avail themselves of it, and knew they were in the right path, Attalus could not help dragging along, scarcely able to put one foot before the other, and at last as morning dawned, he threw himself down, and cried out that he should give himself up to the first traveler he saw. Captivity was better than this.

"Yea, for thee, who art a hostage and a noble," said Leo. "I am only a runaway slave, fit for chains and death."

"No, no!" burst out Attalus, "I would rather die, starved on the road. Then thou canst go on and tell my grandfather thou didst the best for me."

"We are not come that far yet," said the slave; "see there—"

For the light revealed a tree laden with fruit. They were only wild plums, but there were plenty of them, and they were not at all to be despised by these hungry travelers, who ate enough to feel greatly refreshed as they went on their way, venturing along the beaten track as long as they could see a far stretch of it before and behind.

By and by they heard galloping behind them. Happily there was a huge bramble-bush close at hand. They rejoiced now that they had no horses to conceal; they crept behind the briers, and then lay flat on their faces, a good deal terrified, and laying their hands on their knives as the sound of the hoofs slackened in front of them and the riders actually came to a halt.

It was a voice only to well known that said, "I suspect Rheims is not the place, Aldebert. We shall have to seek at Treves for the traitor cook, who must have been in the plot, or find that recreant Garfried of the Blue Sword, who is more like to be sheltering them."

"When that slave swore he had tracked the horses to the marsh—" began Aldebert's voice.

"In league with them! In league with them," answered Hunderik. "He shall smart for it! And as for them, the rogues, bearing off my two best horses, too! when I catch them, one shall be hanged, and the other chopped into little morsels."

With these words, having only paused to breathe their horses, the riders galloped on, while the two fugitives at first lay closer than ever, trembling; but presently Leo exclaimed, "Thanks be to God for the difficulties of our way. If we had not been carried so far down the river, they might have overtaken us."

"And been carrying out those good wishes," said Attalus. "The savage barbarian! As though I were not a hostage, and really free."

"Little would he heed that in his wrath," replied Leo! "But come, up and away! we shall meet no more foes in our path, and can go on boldly now."

If they went on boldly it was still more wearily, and well it was that the two long years of privation had hardened Attalus to hunger and fatigue, or he could never have held out those last miles, which seemed to lengthen themselves out endlessly.

This was the third night of their journey, and the longest of all before the dawn began to show them the outlines of the flat buildings of Rheims, and even then it seemed as if they would never come nearer. However, just as Attalus was about to sink with weariness, the sound of a church bell revived him, and he struggled on, refreshed by the welcome, home-like sound that had not fallen on his ear for these long months and years.

They passed without question under the ancient gate, a triumphal arch with Corinthian columns, for it was Sunday morning, and people were thronging in to the Matins service. It was still dark, and Leo, anxious to get out of the streets, lest he should meet his master, asked at haphazard the first man he met for the house of Father Paulellus, the priest. The man, he thought, looked curiously at the two dusty wayworn travellers, each carrying a shield and a spear; but happily he was in too great haste to do more than briefly reply, "The first house beyond St. Christopher's."

Leo thanked him, and then was sorry to see that he turned to gaze after them.

They had almost forgotten the days of the week in their wanderings, and the Lord's Day had been only observed among the Franks by feasts that had more of the sun in them than of Him Who made the sun. This was once more a Christian place, and Attalus clasped his hands, but his thirsty tongue refused to utter anything as they passed the massive low-arched cathedral, and when they reached the friendly