

## THE COOK AND THE CAPTIVE ;

OR,

## ATTALUS THE HOSTAGE.

BY CHARLOTTE M. YONGE.

CHAPTER XIX.—*Continued.*

Perhaps it was a part of the discretion that Garfried attributed to Aulus that he asked no more questions, and did not mention his own conviction that here was some stratagem. He did not think that it could be a plan of Garfried's for poisoning his enemy, though such proceedings were not by any means unknown among the Franks and Burgundians of the sixth century ; but they were chiefly the work of the women, and Garfried's character stood unusually high for honorable proceedings. But when he remembered that Hunderik was said to have a noble Roman hostage belonging to the Bishop of Langres in his keeping, Aulus winked once or twice with his left eye and had his suspicions.

He was too busy to interrogate Leo all the evening, for parties of Franks flowed in, ate and drank, and continued their orgies till late at night, and throughout all Leo was such an efficient helper that Aulus groaned and sighed over the notion of his being thrown away upon a barbarian, and felt that there must be some grave cause for parting with a treasure whom he longed to retain.

Hunderik was not long in swaggering in to drink a cup of wine and declare that, though he should eat of the King's feast at the Roman palace the next day, he should nevertheless take a final banquet on the good things in which Aulus excelled all others.

In two days' time he came, and sundry friends with him. They threw down their axes, ungirt their swords, loosed their breastplates, and called for wine and meat. Aulus and Leo were ready with a huge side of fat and highly spiced pork, flavored up to the pitch which they knew was most gratifying to the barbarian palate.

"Now there," cried Hunderik, uplifting a lump dripping with oil and adorned with garlic on his dagger—"there's a morsel for a man ! Yet I may rate my senseless Frau forever, and nothing will hinder her from sending me the flesh either burned to a cinder or sodden so as to be fit only for the dogs, with the meat like strings of hemp in the midst."

He spoke as men do who eat at club and mess table better food than their wives at home know how to provide.

But Aulus had his answer. "What wouldst thou give me, sir, for the man who prepared this mess?"

"Give thee? Half the slaves I have. Give

thee? It would not be much to give thee my wife and two daughters into the bargain," cried Hunderik.

"Nay, but what wouldst thou give in good sooth?" said Aulus.

"Art in earnest?"

"Truly I am. I have the man here, a half-Moorish slave by his looks, and am willing to come to terms with thee for him."

"And wherefore part with so rare a cook? Hath he been brawling and slain any—not half of his own worth, I trow?" asked Hunderik, laughing. "A firebrand in thy kitchen, mayhap?"

"Not so, sir. He is a peaceable man so far as I have seen. He has evidently lived in great Roman houses, and been accustomed to their ways."

"Ha! a runaway, whom you do not want to keep?" laughed Hunderik. "Let me see him."

"Hola! Leo! Come and show yourself to the valiant and noble lord."

Leo came, bearing with him a delicious dish of salmon dressed with onions according to the approved taste.

"Ha! a black-looking fellow. Stout limbs those for housework. Where hast thou served, fellow?"

"In the house of a senator, noble sir," replied Leo, standing in a most submissive attitude after he had set down the dish.

"A senator? What senator?"

"The Senator of Aurelium," said Leo, going back to the household of Gregory's father, "the noble Marcus Attalus Decius," giving all with a much more Gallic accent than that with which he usually spoke the language of the Franks.

"Ah! and thou hast left him? Or has a stout Frank carried thee off? Those Gauls have their wily cranks for revenging themselves. Here, let me feel thine arms. Stout flesh and muscle here. Open thy mouth, I would see thy teeth."

"He will have more to do with thy teeth than with his own," put in Aulus.

Hunderik's Frankish wit appreciated the joke, and it ended in the bargaining beginning. Aulus was, of course, determined that Leo should be sold, and chiefly wanted to escape suspicion by not accepting a price too easily; while, on the other hand, Hunderik was much afraid of somebody else coming in and securing this valuable artist, whom he believed firmly to be the lawful property of some great Gallo-Roman, either a runaway or a piece of stolen goods, such as it was expedient to shelter in the Frank mountains as far as possible from civilization. He therefore concluded his arrangements, weighing out to Aulus all his available gold, twelve pieces, bestowing on