

CHAPTER 15 - THE CITY AND THE GODS

We return once more to the Gothic encampment in the suburbs eastward of the Pincian Gate, and to Hermanric and the warriors under his command, who are still posted at that particular position on the great circle of the blockade.

The movements of the young chieftain from place to place expressed, in their variety and rapidity, the restlessness that was agitating his mind. He glanced back frequently from the warriors around him to the remote and opposite quarter of the suburbs, occasionally directing his eyes towards the western horizon, as if anxiously awaiting the approach of some particular hour of the coming night. Weary at length of pursuing occupations which evidently irritated rather than soothed his impatience, he turned abruptly from his companions, and advancing towards the city, paced slowly backwards and forwards over the waste ground between the suburbs and the walls of Rome.

At intervals he still continued to examine the scene around him. A more dreary prospect than now met his view, whether in earth or sky, can hardly be conceived.

The dull sunless day was fast closing, and the portentous heaven gave promise of a stormy night. Thick, black layers of shapeless cloud hung over the whole firmament, save at the western point; and here lay a streak of pale, yellow light, enclosed on all sides by the firm, ungraduated, irregular edges of the masses of gloomy vapour around it. A deep silence hung over the whole atmosphere. The wind was voiceless among the steady trees. The stir and action in the being of nature and the life of man seemed enthralled, suspended, stifled. The air was laden with a burdensome heat; and all things on earth, animate and inanimate, felt the oppression that weighed on them from the higher elements. The people who lay gasping for breath in the famine-stricken city, and the blades of grass that drooped languidly on the dry sward beyond the walls, owned the enfeebling influence alike.

As the hours wore on and night stealthily and gradually advanced, a monotonous darkness overspread, one after another, the objects discernible to Hermanric from the solitary ground he still occupied. Soon the great city faded into one vast, impenetrable shadow, while the suburbs and the low country around them vanished in the thick darkness that gathered almost perceptibly over the earth. And now the sole object distinctly visible was the figure of a weary sentinel, who stood on the frowning rampart immediately above the rifted wall, and whose drooping figure, propped upon his weapon,

was indicated in hard relief against the thin, solitary streak of light still shining in the cold and cloudy wastes of the western sky.

But as the night still deepened, this one space of light faded, contracted, vanished, and with it disappeared the sentinel and the line of rampart on which he was posted. The rule of the darkness now became universal. Densely and rapidly it overspread the whole city with startling suddenness; as if the fearful destiny now working its fulfilment in Rome had forced the external appearances of the night into harmony with its own woe-boding nature.

Then, as the young Goth still lingered at his post of observation, the long, low, tremulous, absorbing roll of thunder afar off became grandly audible. It seemed to proceed from a distance almost incalculable; to be sounding from its cradle in the frozen north; to be journeying about its ice-girdled chambers in the lonely poles. It deepened rather than interrupted the dreary, mysterious stillness of the atmosphere. The lightning, too, had a summer softness in its noiseless and frequent gleam. It was not the fierce lightning of winter, but a warm, fitful brightness, almost fascinating in its light, rapid recurrence, tinged with the glow of heaven, and not with the glare of hell.

There was no wind--no rain; and the air was as hushed as if it slept over chaos in the infancy of a new creation.

Among the various objects displayed, instant by instant, by the rapid lightning to the eyes of Hermanric, the most easily and most distinctly visible was the broad surface of the rifted wall. The large, loose stones, scattered here and there at its base, and the overhanging lid of its broad rampart, became plainly though fitfully apparent in the brief moments of their illumination. The lightning had played for some time over that structure of the fortifications, and the bare ground that stretched immediately beyond them, when the smooth prospect which it thus gave by glimpses to view, was suddenly chequered by a flight of birds appearing from one of the lower divisions of the wall, and flitting uneasily to and fro at one spot before its surface.

As moment after moment the lightning continued to gleam, so the black forms of the birds were visible to the practised eye of the Goth--perceptible, yet evanescent, as sparks of fire or flakes of snow--whirling confusedly and continually about the spot whence they had evidently been startled by some unimaginable interruption. At length, after a lapse of some time, they vanished as suddenly as they had appeared, with shrill notes of affright

which were audible even above the continuous rolling of the thunder; and immediately afterwards, when the lightning alternated with the darkness, there appeared to Hermanric, in the part of the wall where the birds had been first disturbed, a small red gleam, like a spark of fire lodged in the surface of the structure. Then this was lost; a longer obscurity than usual prevailed in the atmosphere, and when the Goth gazed eagerly through the next succession of flashes, they showed him the momentary and doubtful semblance of a human figure, standing erect on the stones at the base of the wall.

Hermanric started with astonishment. Again the lightning ceased. In the ardour of his anxiety to behold more, he strained his eyes with the vain hope of penetrating the obscurity around him. The darkness seemed interminable. Once again the lightning flashed brilliantly out. He looked eagerly towards the wall--the figure was still there.

His heart throbbed quickly within him, as he stood irresolute on the spot he had occupied since the first peal of thunder had struck upon his ear. Were the light and the man--one seen but for an instant, the other still perceptible--mere phantoms of his erring sight, dazzled by the quick recurrence of atmospheric changes through which it had acted? Or did he indubitably behold a human form, and had he really observed a material light? Some strange treachery, some dangerous mystery might be engendering in the besieged city, which it would be his duty to observe and unmask. He drew his sword, and, at the risk of being observed through the lightning, and heard during the pauses in the thunder, by the sentinel on the wall, resolutely advanced to the very foot of the fortifications of hostile Rome.

He heard no sound, perceived no light, observed no figure, as, after several unsuccessful attempts to reach the place where they stood, he at length paused at the loose stones which he knew were heaped at the base of the wall. The next moment he was so close to it, that he could pass his sword-point over parts of its rugged surface. He had scarcely examined thus a space of more than ten yards, before his weapon encountered a sharp, jagged edge; and a sudden presentiment assured him instantly that he had found the spot where he had beheld the momentary light, and that he stood on the same stone which had been occupied by the figure of the man.

After an instant's hesitation, he was about to mount higher on the loose stones, and examine more closely the irregularity he had just discovered in the wall, when a vivid flash of lightning, unusually prolonged, showed him, obstructing at scarcely a yard's distance his onward path, the figure he had

already distantly beheld from the plain behind.

There was something inexpressibly fearful in his viewless vicinity, during the next moment of darkness, to this silent, mysterious form, so imperfectly shown by the lightning that quivered over its half-revealed proportions. Every pulse in the body of the Goth seemed to pause as he stood, with ready weapon, looking into the gloomy darkness, and wafting for the next flash. It came, and displayed to him the man's fierce eyes glaring steadily down upon his face; another gleam, and he beheld his haggard finger placed upon his lip in token of silence; a third, and he saw the arm of the figure pointing towards the plain behind him; and then in the darkness that followed, a hot breath played upon his ear, and a voice whispered to him, through a pause in the rolling of the thunder--'Follow me.'

The next instant Hermanric felt the momentary contact of the man's body, as with noiseless steps he passed him on the stones. It was no time to deliberate or to doubt. He followed close upon the stranger's footsteps, gaining glimpses of his dark form moving onward before, whenever the lightning briefly illuminated the scene, until they arrived at a clump of trees, not far distant from the houses in the suburbs that were occupied by the Goths under his own command.

Here the stranger paused before the trunk of a tree which stood between the city wall and himself, and drew from beneath his ragged cloak a small lantern, carefully covered with a piece of cloth, which he now removed, and holding the light high above his head, regarded the Goth with a steady and anxious scrutiny.

Hermanric attempted to address him first, but the appearance of the man, barely visible though it was by the feeble light of his lantern, was so startling and repulsive, that the half-formed words died away on his lips. The face of the stranger was of a ghastly paleness; his hollow cheeks were seamed with deep wrinkles; and his eyes glared with an expression of ferocious suspicion. One of his arms was covered with old bandages, stiff with coagulated blood, and hung paralysed at his side. The hand that held the light trembled, so that the lantern containing it vibrated continuously in his unsteady grasp. His limbs were lank and shrivelled almost to deformity, and it was with evident difficulty that he stood upright on his feet. Every member of his body seemed to be wasting with a gradual death, while his expression, ardent and forbidding, was stamped with all the energy of manhood, and all the daring of youth.

It was Ulpius! The wall was passed! The breach was made good!

After a protracted examination of Hermanric's countenance and attire, the man, with an imperious expression, strangely at variance with his faltering voice, thus addressed him:--

'You are a Goth?'

'I am,' rejoined the young chief; 'and you are--'

'A friend of the Goths,' was the quick answer.

An instant of silence followed. The dialogue was then again begun by the stranger.

'What brought you alone to the base of the ramparts?' he demanded, and an expression of ungovernable apprehension shot from his eyes as he spoke.

'I saw the appearance of a man in the gleam of the lightning,' answered Hermanric. 'I approached it, to assure myself that my eyes had not deluded me, to discover--'

'There is but one man of your nation who shall discover whence I came and what I would obtain,' interrupted the stranger fiercely; 'that man is Alaric, your king.'

Surprise, indignation, and contempt appeared in the features of the Goth, as he listened to such a declaration from the helpless outcast before him. The man perceived it, and motioning him to be silent, again addressed him.

'Listen!' cried he. 'I have that to reveal to the leader of your forces which will stir the heart of every man in your encampment, if you are trusted with the secret after your king has heard it from my lips! Do you still refuse to guide me to his tent?'

Hermanric laughed scornfully.

'Look on me,' pursued the man, bending forward, and fixing his eyes with savage earnestness upon his listener's face. 'I am alone, old, wounded, weak,--a stranger to your nation,--a famished and a helpless man! Should I venture into your camp--should I risk being slain for a Roman by your comrades--should I dare the wrath of your imperious ruler without a cause?'

He paused; and then, still keeping his eyes on the Goth, continued in lower

and more agitated tones--

'Deny me your help, I will wander through your camp till I find your king! Imprison me, your violence will not open my lips! Slay me, you will gain nothing by my death! But aid me, and to the latest moment of your life you will rejoice in the deed! I have words of terrible import for Alaric's ear,--a secret in the gaining of which I have paid the penalty thus!'

He pointed to his wounded arm. The solemnity of his voice, the rough energy of his words, the stern determination of his aspect, the darkness of the night that was round them, the rolling thunder that seemed to join itself to their discourse, the impressive mystery of their meeting under the city walls, all began to exert their powerful and different influences over the mind of the Goth, changing insensibly the sentiments at first inspired in him by the man's communications. He hesitated, and looked round doubtfully towards the lines of the camp.

There was a long silence, which was again interrupted by the stranger.

'Guard me, chain me, mock at me if you will,' he cried, with raised voice and flashing eyes, 'but lead me to Alaric's tent! I swear to you by the thunder pealing over our heads, that the words I would speak to him will be more precious in his eyes than the brightest jewel he could ravish from the coffers of Rome.'

Though visibly troubled and impressed, Hermanric still hesitated.

'Do you yet delay?' exclaimed the man, with contemptuous impatience. 'Stand back! I will pass on by myself into the very heart of your camp! I entered on my project alone--I will work its fulfilment without help! Stand back!'

And he moved past Hermanric in the direction of the suburbs, with the same look of fierce energy on his withered features which had marked them so strikingly at the outset of his extraordinary interview with the young chieftain.

The daring devotion to his purpose, the reckless toiling after a dangerous and doubtful success, manifested in the words and actions of one so feeble and unaided as the stranger, aroused in the Goth that sentiment of irrepressible admiration which the union of moral and physical courage inevitably awakens. In addition to the incentive to aid the man thus created, an ardent curiosity to discover his secret filled the mind of

Hermanric, and further powerfully inclined him to conduct his determined companion into Alaric's presence--for by such proceeding only could he hope, after the man's firm declaration that he would communicate in the first instance to no one but the king, to penetrate ultimately the object of his mysterious errand. Animated, therefore, by such motives as these, he called to the stranger to stop, and briefly communicated to him his willingness to conduct him instantly to the presence of the leader of the Goths.

The man intimated by a sign his readiness to accept the offer. His physical powers were now evidently fast failing, but he still tottered painfully onward as they moved to the headquarters of the camp, muttering and gesticulating to himself almost incessantly. Once only did he address his conductor during their progress; and then with a startling abruptness of manner, and in tones of vehement anxiety and suspicion, he demanded of the young Goth if he had ever examined the surface of the city wall before that night. Hermanric replied in the negative; and they then proceeded in perfect silence.

Their way lay through the line of encampment to the westward, and was imperfectly lighted by the flame of an occasional torch or the glow of a distant watch-fire. The thunder had diminished in frequency, but had increased in volume; faint breaths of wind soared up fitfully from the west, and already a few raindrops fell slowly to the thirsty earth. The warriors not actually on duty at the different posts of observation had retired to the shelter of their tents; none of the thousand idlers and attendants attached to the great army appeared at their usual haunts; even the few voices that were audible sounded distant and low. The night-scene here, among the ranks of the invaders of Italy, was as gloomy and repelling as on the solitary plains before the walls of Rome.

Ere long the stranger perceived that they had reached a part of the camp more thickly peopled, more carefully illuminated, more strongly fortified, than that through which they had already passed; and the liquid, rushing sound of the waters of the rapid Tiber now caught his suspicious and attentive ear. They still moved onward a few yards; and then paused suddenly before a tent, immediately surrounded by many others, and occupied at all its approaches by groups of richly-armed warriors. Here Hermanric stopped an instant to parley with the sentinel, who, after a short delay, raised the outer covering of the entrance to the tent, and the moment after the Roman adventurer beheld himself standing by his conductor's side in the presence of the Gothic king.

The interior of Alaric's tent was lined with skins, and illuminated by one

small lamp, fastened to the centre pole that supported its roof. The only articles of furniture in the place were some bundles of furs flung down loosely on the ground, and a large, rudely-carved wooden chest, on which stood a polished human skull, hollowed into a sort of clumsy wine-cup. A thoroughly Gothic ruggedness of aspect, a stately Northern simplicity prevailed over the spacious tent, and was indicated not merely in its thick shadows, its calm lights, and its freedom from pomp and glitter, but even in the appearance and employment of its remarkable occupant.

Alaric was seated alone on the wooden chest already described, contemplating with bent brow and abstracted gaze some old Runic characters, traced upon the carved surface of a brass and silver shield, full five feet high, which rested against the side of the tent. The light of the lamp falling upon the polished surface of the weapon--rendered doubly bright by the dark skins behind it--was reflected back upon the figure of the Goth chief. It glowed upon his ample cuirass; it revealed his firm lips, slightly curled by an expression of scornful triumph; it displayed the grand, muscular formation of his arm, which rested--clothed in tightly-fitting leather--upon his knee; it partly brightened over his short, light hair, and glittered steadily in his fixed, thoughtful, manly eyes, which were just perceptible beneath the partial shadow of his contracted brow; while it left the lower part of his body and his right hand, which was supported on the head of a huge, shaggy dog couching at his side, shadowed almost completely by the thick skins heaped confusedly against the sides of the wooden chest. He was so completely absorbed in the contemplation of the Runic characters, traced among the carved figures on his immense shield, that he did not notice the entry of Hermanric and the stranger until the growl of the watchful dog suddenly disturbed him in his occupation. He looked up instantly, his quick, penetrating glance dwelling for a moment on the young chieftain, and then resting steadily and inquiringly on his companion's feeble and mutilated form.

Accustomed to the military brevity and promptitude exacted by his commander in all communications addressed to him by his inferiors, Hermanric, without waiting to be interrogated or attempting to preface or excuse his narrative, shortly related the conversation that had taken place between the stranger and himself on the plain near the Pincian Gate; and then waited respectfully to receive the commendation or incur the rebuke of the king, as the chance of the moment might happen to decide.

After again fixing his eyes in severe scrutiny on the person of the Roman, Alaric spoke to the young warrior in the Gothic language thus:--

'Leave the man with me--return to your post, and there await whatever commands it may be necessary that I should despatch to you to-night.'

Hermanric immediately departed. Then, addressing the stranger for the first time, and speaking in the Latin language, the Gothic leader briefly and significantly intimated to his unknown visitant that they were now alone.

The man's parched lips moved, opened, quivered; his wild, hollow eyes brightened till they absolutely gleamed, but he seemed incapable of uttering a word; his features became horribly convulsed, the foam gathered about his lips, he staggered forward and would have fallen to the ground, had not the king instantly caught him in his strong grasp, and placed him on the wooden chest that he had hitherto occupied himself.

'Can a starving Roman have escaped from the beleaguered city?' muttered Alaric, as he took the skull cup, and poured some of the wine it contained down the stranger's throat.

The liquor was immediately successful in restoring composure to the man's features and consciousness to his mind. He raised himself from the seat, dashed off the cold perspiration that overspread his forehead, and stood upright before the king--the solitary, powerless old man before the vigorous lord of thousands, in the midst of his warriors--without a tremor in his steady eye or a prayer for protection on his haughty lip.

'I, a Roman,' he began, 'come from Rome, against which the invader wars with the weapon of famine, to deliver the city, her people, her palaces, and her treasures into the hands of Alaric the Goth.'

The king started, looked on the speaker for a moment, and then turned from him in impatience and contempt.

'I lie not,' pursued the enthusiast, with a calm dignity that affected even the hardy sensibilities of the Gothic hero. 'Eye me again! Could I come starved, shrivelled, withered thus from any place but Rome? Since I quitted the city an hour has hardly passed, and by the way that I left it the forces of the Goths may enter it to-night.'

'The proof of the harvest is in the quantity of the grain, not in the tongue of the husbandman. Show me your open gates, and I will believe that you have spoken truth,' retorted the king, with a rough laugh.

'I betray the city,' resumed the man sternly, 'but on one condition; grant it

me, and--'

'I will grant you your life,' interrupted Alaric haughtily.

'My life!' cried the Roman, and his shrunken form seemed to expand, and his tremulous voice to grow firm and steady in the very bitterness of his contempt, as he spoke. 'My life! I ask it not of your power! The wreck of my body is scarce strong enough to preserve it to me a single day! I have no home, no loves, no friends, no possessions! I live in Rome a solitary in the midst of the multitude, a pagan in a city of apostates! What is my life to me? I cherish it but for the service of the gods, whose instruments of vengeance against the nation that has denied them I would make you and your hosts! If you slay me, it is a sign to me from them that I am worthless in their cause. I shall die content.'

He ceased. The king's manner, as he listened to him, gradually lost the bluntness and carelessness that had hitherto characterised it, and assumed an attention and a seriousness more in accordance with his high station and important responsibilities. He began to regard the stranger as no common renegade, no ordinary spy, no shallow impostor, who might be driven from his tent with disdain; but as a man important enough to be heard, and ambitious enough to be distrusted. Accordingly, he resumed the seat from which he had risen during the interview, and calmly desired his new ally to explain the condition, on the granting of which depended the promised betrayal of the city of Rome.

The pain-worn and despondent features of Ulpian became animated by a glow of triumph as he heard the sudden mildness and moderation of the king's demand; he raised his head proudly, and advanced a few steps, as he thus loudly and abruptly resumed:--

'Assure to me the overthrow of the Christian churches, the extermination of the Christian priests, and the universal revival of the worship of the gods, and this night shall make you master of the chief city of the empire you are labouring to subvert!'

The boldness, the comprehensiveness, the insanity of wickedness displayed in such a proposition, and emanating from such a source, so astounded the mind of Alaric, as to deprive him for the moment of speech. The stranger, perceiving his temporary inability to answer him, broke the silence which ensued and continued--

'Is my condition a hard one? A conqueror is all-powerful; he can overthrow

the worship, as he can overthrow the government of a nation. What matters it to you, while empire, renown, and treasure are yours, what deities the people adore? Is it a great price to pay for an easy conquest, to make a change which threatens neither your power, your fame, nor your wealth? Do you marvel that I desire from you such a revolution as this? I was born for the gods, in their service I inherited rank and renown, for their cause I have suffered degradation and woe, for their restoration I will plot, combat, die! Assure me then by oath, that with a new rule you will erect our ancient worship, and through my secret inlet to the city I will introduce men enough of the Goths to murder with security the sentinels at the guard-houses, and open the gates of Rome to the numbers of your whole invading forces. Think not to despise the aid of a man unprotected and unknown! The citizens will never yield to your blockade; you shrink from risking the dangers of an assault; the legions of Ravenna are reported on their way hitherward. Outcast as I am, I tell it to you here, in the midst of your camp--your speediest assurance of success rests on my discovery and on me!

The king started suddenly from his seat. 'What fool or madman!' he cried, fixing his eyes in furious scorn and indignation on the stranger's face, 'prates to me about the legions of Ravenna and the dangers of an assault! Think you, renegade, that your city could have resisted me had I chosen to storm it on the first day when I encamped before its walls? Know you that your effeminate soldiery have laid aside the armour of their ancestors, because their puny bodies are too feeble to bear its weight, and that the half of my army here trebles the whole number of the guards of Rome? Now, while you stand before me, I have but to command, and the city shall be annihilated with fire and sword, without the aid of one of the herd of traitors cowering beneath the shelter of its ill-defended walls!

As Alaric spoke thus, some invisible agency seemed to crush, body and mind, the lost wretch whom he addressed. The shock of such an answer as he now heard seemed to strike him idiotic, as a flash of lightning strikes with blindness. He regarded the king with a bewildered stare, waving his hand tremulously backwards and forwards before his face, as if to clear some imaginary darkness off his eyes; then his arm fell helpless by his side, his head drooped upon his breast, and he moaned out in low, vacant tones, 'The restoration of the gods--that is the condition of conquest--the restoration of the gods!'

'I come not hither to be the tool of a frantic and forgotten priesthood,' cried Alaric disdainfully. 'Wherever I meet with your accursed idols I will melt them down into armour for my warriors and shoes for my horses; I will turn your temples into granaries and cut your images of wood into billets for the

watchfires of my hosts!

'Slay me and be silent!' groaned the man, staggering back against the side of the tent, and shrinking under the merciless words of the Goth like a slave under the lash.

'I leave the shedding of such blood as yours to your fellow Romans,' answered the king; 'they alone are worthy of the deed.'

No syllable of reply now escaped the stranger's lips, and after an interval of silence Alaric resumed, in tones divested of their former fiery irritation, and marked by a solemn earnestness that conferred irresistible dignity and force on every word that he uttered.

'Behold the characters engraven there!' said he, pointing to the shield; 'they trace the curse denounced by Odin against the great oppressor, Rome! Once these words made part of the worship of our fathers; the worship has long since vanished, but the words remain; they seal the eternal hatred of the people of the North to the people of the South; they contain the spirit of the great destiny that has brought me to the walls of Rome. Citizen of a fallen empire, the measure of your crimes is full! The voice of a new nation calls through me for the freedom of the earth, which was made for man, and not for Romans! The rule that your ancestors won by strength their posterity shall no longer keep by fraud. For two hundred years, hollow and unlasting truces have alternated with long and bloody wars between your people and mine. Remembering this, remembering the wrongs of the Goths in their settlements in Thrace, the murder of the Gothic youths in the towns of Asia, the massacre of the Gothic hostages in Aquileia, I come--chosen by the supernatural decrees of Heaven--to assure the freedom and satisfy the wrath of my nation, by humbling at its feet the power of tyrannic Rome! It is not for battle and bloodshed that I am encamped before yonder walls. It is to crush to the earth, by famine and woe, the pride of your people and the spirit of your rulers; to tear from you your hidden wealth, and to strip you of your boasted honour; to overthrow by oppression the oppressors of the world; to deny you the glories of a resistance, and to impose on you the shame of a submission. It is for this that I now abstain from storming your city, to encircle it with an immovable blockade!'

As the declaration of his great mission burst thus from the lips of the Gothic king, the spirit of his lofty ambition seemed to diffuse itself over his outward form. His noble stature, his fine proportions, his commanding features, became invested with a simple, primeval grandeur. Contrasted as he now was with the shrunken figure of the spirit-broken stranger, he looked almost

sublime.

A succession of protracted shuddering ran through the Pagan's frame, but he neither wept nor spoke. The unavailing defence of the Temple of Serapis, the defeated revolution at Alexandria, and the abortive intrigue with Vetrico, were now rising on his memory, to heighten the horror of his present and worst overthrow. Every circumstance connected with his desperate passage through the rifted wall revived, fearfully vivid, on his mind. He remembered all the emotions of his first night's labour in the darkness, all the miseries of his second night's torture under the fallen brickwork, all the woe, danger, and despondency that accompanied his subsequent toil--persevered in under the obstructions of a famine-weakened body and a helpless arm--until he passed, in delusive triumph, the last of the hindrances in the long-laboured breach. One after another these banished recollections returned to his memory as he listened to Alaric's rebuking words--reviving past infirmities, opening old wounds, inflicting new lacerations. But, saving the shudderings that still shook his body, no outward witness betrayed the inward torment that assailed him. It was too strong for human words, too terrible for human sympathy;--he suffered it in brute silence. Monstrous as was his plot, the moral punishment of its attempted consummation was severe enough to be worthy of the projected crime.

After watching the man for a few minutes more, with a glance of pitiless disdain, Alaric summoned one of the warriors in attendance; and, having previously commanded him to pass the word to the sentinels, authorising the stranger's free passage through the encampment, he then turned, and, for the last time, addressed him as follows:--

'Return to Rome, through the hole whence, reptile-like, you emerged!--and feed your starving citizens with the words you have heard in the barbarian's tent!'

The guard approached, led him from the presence of the king, issued the necessary directions to the sentinels, and left him to himself. Once he raised his eyes in despairing appeal to the heaven that frowned over his head; but still, no word, or tear, or groan, escaped him. He moved slowly on through the thick darkness; and turning his back on the city, passed, careless whither he strayed, into the streets of the desolate and dispeopled suburbs.