

civil war. All the princes and a majority of the bishops conceived that the denial of the Apostolic benediction would destroy the hopes of the Church party. They beheld in themselves the champions of the Church, and identified their own welfare with that of the Holy See; they believed that Gregory was only restrained by circumstances from granting the prayers of those who had sworn never to desert him; they maintained that although the Pope might not have permitted the election, he could not refuse to sanction their choice after it had been made. Moved by these passionate representations, and, perhaps, expecting to please the Sovereign Pontiff, the legates yielded, and confirmed the election of Rodolph.

When Rodolph heard that he had been called to the throne he shut himself up in his room and sent for Father Omehr. Scarce a minute elapsed before the missionary stood at his side. They gazed at each other in silence for some moments. The duke's lips were compressed, and his brow gathered into a deep frown. Mingled sorrow and hope were portrayed in the missionary's face, and his breast heaved with excitement.

"I am king!" said Rodolph, in a whisper, still scanning the priest, as though he would read his soul.

"Not yet!" was the reply.

"Who can prevent it?"

"God!"

"Most humbly would I submit to His gracious interposition," said the duke, bending his head devoutly; "but can any human power prevent it?"

"Yourself!"

Rodolph buried his face in his hands and with rapid, nervous gestures paced up and down the small apartment.

"Hear me!" he exclaimed, suddenly leading Father Omehr to a chair, and taking a seat beside him. "Hear me!" he repeated, bending forward until his lips almost touched his companion's ear, and the veins swelled in his throat and temples:

"I have toiled and sighed and prayed for this! Day after day, night after night, for years, this has been the aim of all my actions, ay, even the limit of my aspirations. Once to be king—oh! ever since I first clutched a lance I panted for it! In love, in sickness, in peace, in war, I never forgot that one surpassing object—the crown! Hear me on! It is now within my reach—I can touch it—and you ask me to resign it?"

The duke paused a minute, his eagle eye flashing fire; then, with a vehemence almost appalling, he resumed: "You ask me to resign it—and I would, without a pang—gladly, cheerfully—this very instant! Yes—I swear to you—here in the presence of my Creator, that I no longer covet the crown I have well-nigh worshipped; that, but for Germany and the Church, I would rather place it on Henry's perjured head than wear it on my own!"

"Then you will resign it?" said the missionary, eagerly.

Rodolph slowly shook his head and fixed his eyes upon the floor.

"Let no fears for the Church and your country restrain you," pursued the priest; "they both demand your refusal, not your acceptance."

Still Rodolph sternly shook his head.

"Then as you value honor, defer your decision until the appointed time—our Holy Father may still be with us—it is treacherous to deprive him of the opportunity of interfering, by thus anticipating by a month the day on which we invited him to meet us."

"It is too late for interference now," replied the duke, "and of what avail is it to pause on the brink, when all the avenues from Carpineta are closed by Henry's minions?"

"Have confidence, I conjure you," exclaimed the other, passionately, "in virtue and wisdom of his Holiness. Rest assured that he will find some means to avert bloodshed and yet preserve his See and the empire."

"War is inevitable!"

"Obey the Pope and trust in God. Beware how you take upon yourself to plunge the nation in war—to tear down the sacred barriers of peace—and open the floodgates for a thousand evil passions to deluge Germany with crime and blood! Can you foresee what may occur—what a month may develop—what new political combination the master mind of Gregory may devise for our preservation?"

"I must rather beware," returned the noble, "how I sacrifice the last hope of my country and the main support of religion by procrastination and criminal hesitation. If I refuse the crown, I disband my party. Men will leave us, and say we tremble, and before long we are at the tender mercies of the tyrant, for my resignation, while striking terror into our ranks, will infuse new courage into his. Then would I see my allies—the friends whom I seduced into rebellion and then abandoned—destroyed in detail—pursued, hunted down, exiled, and martyred before my eyes. No! come what may, I must accept."

"What is your situation now," rejoined the missionary, "that you have anything else to expect than defeat and disgrace? You know the emperor—you have seen his dauntless courage, his consummate skill, his desperate resolution. You know that he is at the head of an army more numerous and better disciplined than your own. And you must also clearly foresee that if the Pope—as he certainly will—shall condemn the policy of his legates, your efforts will want the principle of life which alone can bless them with success."

"If the prospect now is bad," said Rodolph, solemnly, "delay can only make it worse. And I believe that, could his Holiness see what is evident to us, he would command me to accept the crown, and place it with his own hands upon my head."

"You are mistaken—woefully mistaken, my lord. While a hope of averting anarchy and civil war remains, Gregory will not adopt the surest means of inflicting both. Trust in God for the future! Do not pursue what to the mole-blind vision of humanity seems expedient, when certain bloodshed is the result! Humble yourself before Him who alone can exalt and lay low! Confide in the efficacy of prayer! Think not that God will desert His Church or her champions!"

"I do trust in the future," answered the duke, "but not until I have embraced what reason dictates for the present."

"Do you hold your reason more enlightened than that of his Holiness?"

"He cannot see what I see. Urge me no more! It is too late to recede. I know well what dangers I incur by accepting the crown—and what disgrace I should earn in refusing it. Did I consult my inclinations, I should renounce the glittering ornament: but I will not have men to point at me covertly and say, 'He faltered!' I will not endanger the noble barons who have devoted themselves to my advancement. If I have sinned in alluring them thus far, I will not deepen my guilt by betraying them. Though I knew that the crown which I am about to assume were like the gift of Medea, I would still set it on my temples: better pay the penalty of ambition by advancing than by timidly retreating, when boldness may remedy, and retreat is certain death!"

The tread of armed men was heard along the passage, and immediately afterward the Count Mangold entered the room.

"The diet awaits your highness' answer," he said, bowing deeply to the duke.

"I will follow you," said Rodolph, "and deliver it in person." Saying this, he strode proudly from the room, preceded by the count and his attendants.

As the door closed behind them, Father Omehr fell upon his knees. He knelt there with the tears streaming down his pale cheeks and his hands clasped in prayer, until a long loud shout announced Rodolph's acceptance. Then the trumpets' merry notes, mingled with the joyful clang of arms, went up to heaven together with the missionary's sighs. Father Omehr appeared scarcely to hear the martial revelry, but as the tumult increased, he rose and glided from the room.

Amid the congratulations of the bishops, nobles, and people, Rodolph proceeded in great pomp to Mayence, where he was to be crowned and consecrated the following day. It was after nightfall when Rodolph reached the palace prepared for his reception; and seizing the first moment to escape from the embraces of his friends, he retired early to his chambers, accompanied only by Gilbert de Hers. Rodolph had always evinced a strong partiality for Gilbert, which the youth repaid by the liveliest love and admiration. No sooner were they alone, than the duke threw himself dejectedly into a chair, and was soon plunged into a fit of gloomy abstraction. Gilbert stood motionless beside him, inwardly wondering at the silence and despondency of the man, who, a moment before, had been gayly exchanging felicitations with all who approached him.

"Sit down, my son," said the duke.

Gilbert mechanically obeyed.

"Do I seem happy?" asked Rodolph.

"No, my lord; are you unwell?"

"Do I seem overwhelmed with joy at my good fortune?"

"Has anything befallen you, sire?" inquired the youth.

"Yes!" cried the monarch-elect, seizing his wrist, "the gratification of my ambition!" Gilbert started at the trembling tones and excited gesture of his companion.

"Gilbert," continued the duke, regaining his composure, "you see me in possession of all that I ever craved on earth. I am now legally invested with the imperial crown. It

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