



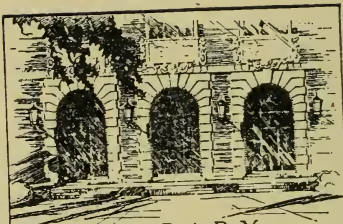
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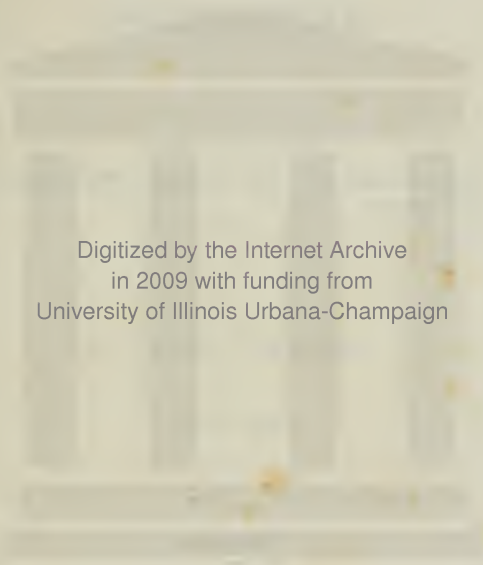
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VALERIUS;

A

ROMAN STORY.

They'll sit by the fire, and presume to know what's done i'the Capitol

SHAKESPEARE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED FOR WILLIAM BLACKWOOD, EDINBURGH;
AND T. CADELL, STRAND, LONDON.

1821.

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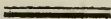
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VALERIUS.

VALERIUS.



CHAPTER I.

THE Centurion, in virtue of his office, had free access to the gardens of Trajan ; so he led us by both a more delightful and a nearer path towards the Salarean Gate.* Young Sextus then left us by ourselves, and we returned slowly through the beau-

* Trajan's private villa, where he chiefly resided, was on the Hill of Gardens, now called *the Pincian*. It was divided into two parts, the *Villa Inferior*, and the *Villa Superior*, these being connected by bridges.

tiful groves of the Imperial Villa, in hopes of finding my kinsman by the time we should reach his mansion. But as we were walking very quietly along one of the broad green terraces, we heard voices in an adjoining alley, separated from us by luxuriant thickets of myrtle, and Sabinus, whispering to me, "Hush, let us see what we have got here," insinuated himself with great dexterity among the verdant shrubs. I followed him with as little noise as was possible, and having found a convenient peeping place, we soon perceived two figures, a man and a woman, walking side by side, apparently in earnest conversation, at some little distance from us in the moonlight.

"Come, Sabinus," I whispered, "it is some couple of lovers perhaps—I don't see what right we have to overhear their tender discourse."

"Peace, peace," quoth he, "if you stir, they will detect us, and it is nothing unless it be known."

With some reluctance I remained where I was ; but my scruples were at an end the moment I perceived who they were.

“ Most noble, most illustrious lady,” said one, who could be nobody but Xerophrates, “ this matter has indeed been conducted unfortunately, yet no reason see I why you should give way to so many groundless apprehensions. The only thing, after all, that you have lost, if indeed you have lost it, is the good opinion of Licinius ; for, as to that foolish boy——”

“ Name him not, name him not,” replied the Lady Rubellia, in a voice of much agitation ; “ name not the silly stripling. Surely madness only can account for my behaviour.”

“ Madness !” quoth the Stoic ; “ yes, truly, and who at certain moments is free from such madness ? As Euripides has expressed it (I think in the Medea,) Venus, if she come in wisdom, is the wisest ; if otherwise, the most frenzied of all influences. The greatest and the wisest have

not been exempt from such visitations. Banish it from your heart, noble lady, or replace it by something more worthy of your discernment. There is, I think, but one pair of eyes in Rome that could have been blind to such perfections."

"Oh, Xerophrastes!" said she, "speak not to me of perfections. Alas! I was born under a deceitful star—a star of apparent splendour and real misery."

"Noble lady," he replied, "I swear to you that what tincture of philosophy I have imbibed, is unable to sustain my serenity, when I hear such words from your lips; you are surrounded by all that externals can muster. It is your part to compose your mind, and then how should it be possible for you to taste of unhappiness? Think no more of that foolish Sextus."

"Think of him?" said she; "I swear to you I think of him no more, than if he did not exist;" and she burst into tears as she spake.

The philosopher took her hand with an air of the deepest sympathy, and at the same time drew the end of his mantle over his face, as if to conceal the extent of his participation in her distresses.

“Noblest, loveliest Rubellia,” said he, (half sobbing I think,) “this would make a child of a man. I swear to you I forget myself in your griefs; and yet,” he added, laying his brawny hand upon his bosom, “if any powers there be that take cognisance of the affairs of humanity, they know that your poor servant has sorrows of his own. Alas! lady, this is, after all, a miserable world. There is no rest but in the affections, and, behold, how they are harassed on every hand, by the invidious accidents of life. Philosophy proclaims her antidote, but the poison is every where; and it is all one course of being wounded to be cured, and being cured only to be more easily wounded again. I thought I had overcome all this, but alas! (he sobbed

audibly,) I feel that I am but a man, and that all is to begin again."

"Xerophrastes," interrupted the lady, composing herself, "must I in my turn become the comforter?" And so saying, she led the philosopher to a marble seat that was just opposite to us.

"Oh, Cithæron!"—he proceeded, sitting down by her side, and yet as if not conscious of her interruption,—“Oh, ancient Cithæron! me fancy bears to the tranquillity of thy shady groves—or to Tempe and the green recesses of her ever nemorose and gelid vales! Oh, cities! woe be to him that first invented the conglomeration of edifices, and the wide sweep of nature-violating walls!—Why did I, foolish and headstrong, abandon native felicity for the game in which so much must be lost, and so little can be gained? Unhappy day, that I first saw yellow Tiber winding among the state-ly prison-houses of Rome!”

“Prison-houses!” quoth the lady, “what is your meaning?”

The philosopher made no answer for a moment, but continued sitting by the lady in an attitude of the most pensive contemplation. The moon-beams fell full on his high brow and the large massy features of his countenance, and on the robust limbs which emerged from below the stately folds of his mantle; and I could not help thinking that there was something almost heroic, which I had never before remarked, in the whole of his appearance. Rubellia kept her eyes fixed stedfastly upon him, with an expression which I half thought had something in it of admiration. At last, she repeated her interrogation.

He started, as if from the profoundest musing, and said, "Oh pardon my abstraction! Surely I am not used to behave thus foolishly;—I talked of prisons; and what other name should be more fitting for the dwelling of those who are not free?"

"The sway of Trajan," said Rubellia, "can scarcely be talked of so harshly."

“ I speak not of Trajan,” quoth he, very gravely ; “ I speak of the evil sway of custom, and the foul coercion of opinion, compared to which Kingly, or Cæsarean despotism is less than flax to brazen fetters.—Rome ! imperial Rome ! is one mighty prison ! and her noblest spirits are enslaved !”

“ I understand you not,” quoth she, gazing earnestly upon his averted face.

“ I should have known nothing of it,” replied he, “ had I never deserted my paternal valley for the vain pleasures of Athens, and the magnificence of Rome.”

“ You repent,” said she, “ that you ever visited Italy ?”

“ And if I leave Italy,” quoth he, “ who, I pray you, will regret my departure ? Licinius is enraged with me—I can scarcely bear to look in his face,—and if he throws me off, where shall I bury my griefs, of which his desertion is the least ?”

“ You talk of this orator,” she replied, in a haughty tone,—“ you talk of this most

eloquent Licinius, as if he were as great a man all the world over, as he is in his little corner of the Forum. If you have offended him, it was in my service,—and think ye I am not able to make up for all of which Licinius can deprive you?—Speak—command me—say what I can do for you, and it shall be done.”

Hereupon the manly breast of the philosopher was distended with a heavy sigh; having given vent to which, he laid his hand upon his forehead, but no winged word escaped the barrier of his lips.

“By Jove!” whispered Sabinus, scarcely able to contain himself,—“by Jove, he has it!—’tis the most Stoical malady of the heart.”

“Xerophrastes,” resumed the lady, “I pray you deal with me openly. If it be your wish to leave Rome, speak, and I shall put it in your power to retire to Greece as handsomely as you could ever have hoped to do from the family of Licinius. Of

wealth, as you well know, I have enough both for myself and for my faithful friends, among whom, be sure, I place you in the first rank. Controul your feelings, I pray you once more—and speak freely.”

The philosopher lifted his hand from his face, looked upon the lady with eyes that glistened, or seemed to glisten, with emotion, and then clasped his brows again, as if wanting words or courage to express his wishes or his feelings. She, in the meantime, continued to regard the melancholy man with an aspect of so much anxiety, that—why should I deny it?—I half suspected her of sharing the suspicion of Sabinus. After a pause of some moments, during which both preserved the same attitudes, Xerophrastes at last seemed in some measure to recover himself, and once more uncovered his eyes, which, however, he lifted not from the ground. The lady laid her delicate fingers upon the strong hand which rested upon the knee of the Stoic, and urged

him, apparently in a tone of yet greater kindness than before, to make her the confidante of his griefs. It was then that the native boldness of the Thracian seemed to overcome the timidity of the dependent and the rhetorician. Hastily and fervently he pressed his lip upon the beautiful hand of Rubellia, and whispered something into her ear. She started, and I think blushed in the moonlight; but neither seemed offended very deeply with what he had said, nor with the gesture he had used.

“Softly, softly,” whispered again the Centurion, very bitterly; “be not ashamed, fair lady, of the love of thy servant.”*

But (whether the echo of our whispers had reached her ear or not, I cannot tell,) scarcely had these words been uttered, ere Rubellia started from her seat, and began to move pretty quickly down the shaded alley, as if towards the entrance of the gar-

* Ne sit ancillæ tibi amor pudori.—HOR.

dens. Xerophrastes sate still for a moment, even after the lady had arisen, covering his eyes, and part of his broad forehead with his hands, as if buried in his own thoughts too deeply to be with ease affected with a sense of things passing around him. Then, at last, he arose, and uttering an exclamation of surprise, walked after the noble dame, taking heed, however, (it did not escape our observation,) to arrange, as he rapidly followed her, the massive folds of his mantle into a graceful drapery. We very soon lost sight of them among the drooping boughs of the sycamores and old lime-trees, and the sound of their retreating footsteps died away upon the surface of the smooth green turf.

Sabinus with difficulty restrained himself till they were beyond the reach of his voice ; but he then made himself ample amends by the violence of the laughter in which he began to indulge. “ Ha !” said he, “ is this to be the end of it ? Most pen-

sive ghost of Leberinus, is this to be thy successor?"

"Good heavens!" said I, "Sabinus, do you think it possible she should make the pedagogue her husband—she that was but yesterday so desperately enamoured of the beautiful young Sextus?"

"My dear islander," quoth the Centurion, "do you remember the story of a certain beautiful boy, called Adonis?"

"To be sure," said I, "who is ignorant of the story of Adonis, or of the beautiful verses of Bion—

'I weep for fair Adonis—for Adonis is no more,
Dead is the fair Adonis—his beauty I deplore;
His white thigh with a tusk of white, the greenwood
monster tore,
And now I weep Adonis,—for Adonis is no more.'"

"Well spouted, by my faith," quoth the soldier; "and with an excellent gravity, and most dolorous cadences: But think

* Elegy I.

you Venus never altered the burden of her ditty? Have you never heard of Mars the blood-stained, the destroyer of men, the leveller of city-walls—nor of Anchises, the Dardan shepherd, wiser in his generation than one who inherited both his station and his opportunity; no, nor even of Vulcan, the cunning Artificer, the Lord of the One-eyed Hammerers, the Lemnian, the Chain-maker, the Detector, the awkward Cup-bearer, whose ministration, as honest Homer confesses, fills Olympus with inextinguishable laughter.—Have you heard of all these, and I take it of a few more besides; and yet do you talk as if Venus, after the white boar's tusk had pierced the white thigh of her Adonis, had made no use of her beautiful girdle, but to wipe the tears from her pretty eyes withal?—her girdle, of which, heaven pity your memory, I know not how many blessed ages after Adonis had fallen, the same faithful bard said,

' In it is stored whate'er can love inspire—
 In it is tender passion—warm desire—
 Fond lovers' soft and amorous intercourse—
 The endearing looks and accents that can fire
 The soul with passionate love's resistless force—
 'Gainst which the wisest find in wisdom no resource.' *

Why, man, there seems every reason to think, that so far from thinking of him longer than any one else did, she was the very first to forget him. For, to this day, the girls both in Greece and Egypt put ashes on their hair one day in the twelve-month, and I have seen them myself setting open coffins at their doors, in commemoration of Adonis; but I never heard that Venus is less sportive that doleful night than any other in the year. No, my most innocent and unsuspecting Briton, although Sextus has hunted in woods hated by Rubellia, and although the quarry has for ever deprived her of him, be you nothing afraid lest grief be her poison. By the arrow of

* Iliad, 14.

Cupid, I see no reason why our Thracian should not play the part of an Anchises, as well as any shepherd that ever trod the soil of Ida. Why, he looked so well in the moonlight, that, were this Latmos, I would advise Rubellia not to let Dian herself see too much of him."

"To be sure," I answered, "the externals of the philosopher are much altered for the better."

"You mean his dress," quoth the Centurion; "but I don't think that matters much. No, no, give the man his due, he may be neither Athenian nor philosopher; but, by Jove, he has as trim a leg as ever a lady's eye need desire to look upon."

While uttering these last words, Sabinus drew up the skirts of his sagum, and was manifestly observing, not with displeasure, the nervous outlines of his own nether limbs.

"Why, Xerophrastes is well enough," said I, "but yet his legs want that decided compact air which I chiefly admire"——

“That firm, soldier-like, brazen rigidity,” interrupted the Centurion, (still looking downwards.)

“That beautiful elasticity of the well-strung shank,” said I.

“That fine, sharp cut, carrying the calf into the ankle,” quoth he.

“That indescribable something,” said I.

“By Jove,” quoth the Centurion, “these sandals of mine have been but three times buckled, and yet see you how they are beginning to give way. I must change this fellow—I must certainly change him.”

“Ha! ha! my dear Sabinus,” said I, no longer able to contain myself; “I am sure you will at least never wish to change the legs on which they are tied.”

“You jack-a-napes,” quoth he, “I believe the boy has been quizzing me this half hour.”

“Not a bit,” said I—“not a bit, my dear Sabinus; I was only thinking, that, if Rubellia wished to choose a husband by the shape of his legs, she might have shewn

better taste by looking elsewhere than on the Stoic. He certainly is not to be compared, as to that point, with some men I have seen."

"I don't deny," replied the good-humoured man, (easily pacified,) "that Xerophrastes tends a little—a very little towards the clumsy. But perhaps the widow may not disapprove of that defect. Variety is certainly agreeable in most matters, and if she wished to find a pair of legs as different as possible from those of Leberinus, I must confess the Stoic was just the man for her. Poor, good Leberinus!" continued he, again looking downwards, "I am sure your leg never stretched your sandal; I doubt if your widest latchet would have gone twice round the great toe of your successor, since such he is to be."

"After all," said I, "let her faults be what they may, do you not think it is a great shame, that a lady of her rank and fortune should throw every thing away upon such a great clumsy thick-legged

ploughman as this—such a huge Thracian mountaineer—such a gluttonous porker?”

The Centurion whistled.

“She,” I continued, “that might perhaps have intermarried with one of the first characters of Rome.”

The Centurion whistled a still louder note; and with that we found ourselves once more close by the gate of the imperial gardens. A carriage was just driving off as we opened the postern. Sabinus ceased from whistling till it passed us,—muttered between his teeth, “By Jove! the fellow’s ancles are as clumsy as door-posts,”—and then fell a whistling again more lustily than ever.

He whistled on so till the sound of the chariot-wheels had died away in the hum of the distant streets; and then starting as if from some very profound reverie, indulged himself in one of his own most jovial peals of laughter. “And well,” said he, “there is one thing I am resolved on, and that is, that I shall be present at their wed-

ding. By Jove, I was there the night she espoused Leberinus, and I pitied her very sincerely, when I saw the pretty creature lifted over the old man's threshold in her yellow veil, which I could not help thinking concealed more sighs, if not more blushes, than are usual on such occasions. But I promise you the glare of her new torches, and the echo of the trumpets that are shortly about to be sounded, shall affect me with very different emotions; and then as to the epithalamium!—Why such a subject might make any man a poet. I think I shall try my hand on one myself. I wish we were but in Alexandria, I should contrive to make it find its way into every newspaper in the city.”*

“ Malicious man,” said I, “ is it not

* The *acta diurna* of Alexandria were proverbial for being filled with all manner of ribaldry and private slander. They were the favourite reading of Domitian. But there is no reason to think, that the daily papers (I had almost said the daily press) of Rome ever ventured upon the same species of licence.

enough for you to enjoy the joke yourself?"

"Myself?" he replied; "by Jove, you are much mistaken, if you think I sha'n't share it with half Rome! Why every one knows Rubellia, and I think this affair will produce more mirth, if it really goes on so, than any thing that has happened since the mad days of Poppæa. Rubellia and Xerophrates—Venus and Saturn—and yet why should I speak of Saturn—I am sure it will be **THE GOLDEN AGE** for the Thracian."

"And what will the ladies do?" said I.

"Laugh at her, to be sure," replied he, "and perhaps imitate her example as soon as they have an opportunity. By the power of Mars, they are all alike. It is but flattery and boldness; and there is no one need despair. They look on themselves as so many superior spirits, which it is our whole business to worship; and no doubt they have their time of it. But when once you have found the charm to move them, why they dare refuse you nothing. They

may babble as they will ; but they are as powerless as the poor shades were before Tiresias."

" You do not always use to speak or to think of them quite so contemptuously," said I. " I am sure you have yourself worshipped in good earnest ere now, and without any thought of tyrannising over the object of your adoration."

The Centurion whistled again a very shrill note, and replied, with great emphasis, " My dear Valerius, if you get Athanasia to yourself, as I hope, in spite of all these troubles, you yet shall (since you have set your heart upon it,) take my advice, and carry her with you to Britain before she has lived one week among these Roman matrons. The moment a girl is married, they consider her as one of themselves, and tell her every thing ; and by Jove, there is no good to be got from their lessons. Proud, haughty, and imperious, how fortunate it is that they are also vain, silly, luxurious,—and, above all, that they are the fools of

flattery. That is the chain that can bind them to the earth, however they carry their heads in the clouds. We were talking of all the fine things that Homer has put into the girdle of Venus. Well, Flattery fell to our share, and I think it is a fair equivalent for the whole bunch of them."

CHAPTER II.

SUCH talk passed between myself and the somewhat irritated Centurion, as we proceeded with slow steps down the descent from the gardens of Trajan, and on towards the vicinity of Licinius' house. But as we advanced into the more peopled region of the city, we found the streets full of crowds and clamour, insomuch, that we had some difficulty in walking together, and that such quiet discourse as had occupied us could no longer be carried on. The evening was one of the most lovely I had ever seen, and the moon was shedding a soft and yellow light upon the lofty towers and trees, and upon all that long perspec-

tive of pillars and porticos, with which those proud Roman streets were, for the most part, lined on either side. Yet many groups of citizens were seen running to and fro with torches in their hands; while many more were stationary in great and impenetrable crowds, which, although there was much noise of merriment, and many songs and shouts of laughter among them, had the air, as it seemed to us, of being detained in expectation of some show or spectacle, yet more attractive than their present sources of amusement.

And accordingly we had not jostled on much farther, ere there arose behind us a peal, apparently at a considerable distance, of what seemed to me to be martial music, which the multitude around no sooner heard, than their noise and acclamation became more violent than ever. Ever and anon, nevertheless, they hushed themselves for an instant, as if to ascertain the progress of those who sounded the instruments; and then the more near they seemed to have

come towards them, the more jubilant again and triumphant was the renewal of their outcries. Sabinus expressed at first some little displeasure, in having our return impeded after this fashion, and began to look about him, in case any inferior or off-shooting street might furnish us an opportunity of making our escape from these vociferous multitudes. But ere the sound of the approaching music had once or twice reached his ear, he became satisfied that all this was quite in vain.

“By my faith,” said he, “I believe it is some troop of the Galli—yes, yes—I cannot be mistaken—there is the cymbal—there again is the shrill echo of the Phrygian horn, which to me sounds always as if the breath could not come without agony through its twisted folds—and—ay—there can be no doubt about it now, there is the hoarse big drum, by which they design to set forth the roaring of Cybele’s lions. Well, we shall be able to distinguish the squeak of the beardless priests themselves by and

by. We must e'en be content, Valerius, and remain here till the torches pass us ; for the deeper we might advance into the city to-night, you may be sure we should find ourselves only so much the worse. I think these fellows might satisfy themselves with their *Hilaria*."

"That I believe," said I, "is their great feast at the vernal equinox, when they wash the lions and chariot of the goddess in the Tiber."

"Yes," quoth he ; "and I promise you it is a grand sight after its fashion ; for they spare no expence, and they generally show lions such as the Amphitheatre cannot exhibit once in ten years. The last time I was present, there were four tawny monsters yoked abreast to drag the great rumbling brazen-chariot of the goddess ; but how grand soever the sight of them was, you may guess there remained not many to face it in the streets. Windows, however—balconies, and so forth—all were crowded ; and by Jove, to hear the growl-

ing of the noble brutes, as they scoured down the Sacred Way, with the huge wheels clattering behind them, and then the hallooing of the mad priests, whose command over them seemed to be wonderfully perfect—I don't think there is a single religious ceremony in Rome that is worthy of being named in the same day with it. The East, after all, is the true seat of horrors; and indeed, they say, even the feast of Cybele is nothing at all here, compared to what it is in Ephesus, or Antioch, or Alexandria. But I have never had the good luck to witness it in any of these places. I wish the Emperor would grant me the reversion of their cast-off lions; for I believe they never use the same set twice. I think I could contrive to make a snug thing of it, with the assistance of our black-faced friend Aspar."

"And what," said I, "may be the nature of this procession which we are about to witness?—Shall we see the lions?"

“ No, no, these are never shewn but once in the twelvemonth, man, on the great chariot day of which I was speaking. But the priests themselves are not satisfied with being exhibited quite so sparingly, and that is what I was complaining of. All through the summer these fellows are running about among the villages, with a brazen image of the Goddess, and wherever they arrive, the poor people that hear the sound of their fearful horns and cymbals, are fain to come and pay them contributions—which they call feeding the lions of Cybele. Without doubt, it is from one of these marches that they are now returning—and hear them ! By Jove, they do the thing well, beardless though they be ; I am sure you will confess ’tis the finest music of the sort you ever heard.”

“ Indeed,” said I, “ ’tis an awful music, and such as may well be imagined to have had its origin in hoary woods, and beside old dark rivers rushing through the wilderness.”

“ Atys, Atys,” quoth the Centurion ;
“ aye, I thought it must needs be the song
of Atys they were singing—Mark, now,
how the strain varies—sinks, swells, and
then sinks again. I will tell you what the
meaning of this is. It is meant to set forth
the flight of the poor creature over wood
and wild hill, and down every yawning
ravine, and then up the rocks, and away
again over the moors ; and all the way
the roar of the lions, and the clanging of
the furious cymbals is pursuing him on the
breeze. By Jove, if sounds were to drive
a man mad, these certainly are the likeliest
I ever heard.”

The Galli meantime had advanced so
near to us, that even I who had never lis-
tened to them before, could comprehend
some of the words of the chaunt, to which
all this accompaniment was applied ; and,
as the Centurion had judged, the burden
of all was indeed continual glorying over
the disaster of Atys. I remembered the
most mournful verses of Catullus concern-

ing the same fable, and therefore could not help shuddering at hearing it made the subject of such different celebration. But as for the Centurion, he, now that all was within our distinct hearing, was, I thought, chiefly taken up with the excellence of the music ; or at least, if there was any deeper feeling in his mind, I could perceive no trace of it in the style wherein he raised his stout voice to swell the chorus of the advancing priests. They that stood near, hearing him do so, eagerly followed his example ; so that now the clear notes of the priests of the Goddess were contrasted, not only with the deep murmuring of their own music, but with recurring bursts of rough and manly melody, from all the great multitudes through which their march was to be.

At last they came quite close to us, and passed on dancing and singing around the image of the Goddess, right before the place where we were standing. A path being

opened for them by the crowd all along, they made no halt in their progress, but went on at the same pace, some of them leaping high from the ground as they dashed their cymbals, and others dancing lowly while they blew the long Phrygian trumpets and crooked horns of brass. The image itself was seated in a brazen chariot, to which brazen lions also were fastened, the whole being borne on the shoulders of some of the assistants. Behind it came others, beating great hollow drums; and then again more, leaping, and dancing, and singing, like those who preceded it. They were all clad in long Asiatic vests, with lofty tiaras, and their countenances, as well as their voices, intimated sufficiently that they were ministers of the same order to which the hapless Atys had belonged. Yet nothing but enthusiasm and triumph could be discovered in their manner of singing that terrible chaunt; for I suppose it was all of the same strain with the part of it which was

sung as they went by the Centurion and myself.

“ Now is he come unto the Phrygian sea—
 Below him, on the waste and yellow shore,
 The mighty billows everlastingly
 Dash, like devouring monsters—dash and roar.

“ He gazes wide for hope, but hope is none—
 For, even like the beasts from whom he flies,
 The maned billows seem for him to groan ;
 Madness is in their foam and in their cries.

“ Fly, Atys, fly,
 The car is nigh ;
 The haunted wood
 O'erhangs the flood ;
 The heavy breeze
 Is in the trees ;
 The fierce waves leap
 Upon the steep :
 Yet fly, mad Atys, fly, and hear
 Her lions roaring nearer, and more near.
 Fly, Atys, fly !

“ Unto the forest wilt thou turn again ?
 Free paths and wide, mad Atys, wait thee there.
 Fly where the oak boughs droop upon the plain,
 Fly, where beneath the pines the earth lies bare.

“ Plunge, Atys, plunge into the reverend gloom
 Of the most ancient bearded wilderness ;
 No hope is there of shelter from thy doom,
 Yet haste, young Atys, haste thee not the less.

" Fly, Atys, fly !
 The car is nigh ;
 The solitude
 Of the black wood
 Hath coverts good,
 Where many a brood
 Of beast and fowl
 May scream and howl.
 But no dark lair
 For thee is there,
 No shelter kind
 Thy feet shall find :—
 Fly, Atys, fly, and in thine ear
 Be still the lion-roar near, and more near.
 Fly, Atys, fly !"

So singing, they had not advanced much beyond the spot where we were standing, ere they stopped of a sudden their hitherto rapid dance of progress, and, placing the chariot and image of Cybele between the pillars of one of the porticos that run out into the street, began a more stationary and solemn species of saltation, in front of the sacred emblems. When they had finished this dance also, and the more stately and measured chaunt of supplication with which it was accompanied, the priests then turn-

ed to the multitude, and called upon all those who revered the Didymæan mysteries, and the awful powers of their Goddess, to approach her image and offer their gifts. And immediately, when they had said so, the multitude that were beyond formed themselves into a close phalanx, quite across the street, and torches being conveyed into the hands of such as stood in the foremost rank, there was left forthwith in front of the image and of the priestly attendants, an open space, brightly illuminated, for the convenience, as it seemed, of those who might come forward to carry their offerings to the foot of the statue. And, indeed, it appeared as if these were not likely to be few in number ; for the way being quite blocked up by those torchbearers, no one could hope to pass on easily without giving something, or to pass at all without being observed. Not a few chariots, therefore, and litters also, having been detained in consequence of the crowd upon

the streets, the persons who were seated in these vehicles seemed to be anxious, as soon as possible, to present their offerings, that so the path onward into the city might be cleared to them, by command of the priests. It was necessary, however, as it turned out, that each person in advancing to the chariot of Cybele, should imitate the dancing motions practised by the Galli themselves ; and this circumstance, as may well be imagined, was far from being the most acceptable part of the ceremony to some of those who had thus been detained. A few of the common sort, both men and women, advanced at once boldly into the open ring, and with great appearance of joy went through all the necessary gesticulations. But, at first, none of the more lordly tenants of the chariots and litters seemed to be able to prevail on themselves to follow the example.

At length, however, the impatience even of these dignified persons began to over-

come their reluctance ; one and another red-edged gown was seen to float in lofty undulations across the torch-lighted stage, and when a handful of coin was heard to ring upon the basin of the Goddess, you may take it for granted the priests half-cracked their cheeks in blowing horn and trumpet, and clattered upon their great tamborines at least as violently as if they had made prize of another Atys. But how did the Centurion chuckle when he observed (for we by this time had squeezed very near to the statue,) that one of the next chariots was no other than that of Rubellia herself, and perceived that she and the Stoic were now about to pass onwards like the rest, at the expence both of giving money to the lions of Cybele, and of exhibiting their agility before the eyes of all that multitude.

“ Jove in heaven !” cried he, “ I thought the garden scene was all in all ; but this beats it to atoms ! Behold how the sturdy Thracian tucks up his garment above his

sinewy knee, and how, nodding to the blows of the tamborine, he already meditates within himself the appropriate convolutions of the dance. And the pretty widow ! by the girdle of Venus, she also is pointing her trim toe, and, look ye ! better and better, do you not see that she has given her veil to the Stoic, that so she may perform the more expeditely ?”

“ I see it all,” said I, “ but do speak lower, dear Sabinus ; for, be sure, they would neither of them poise themselves half so gracefully, if they thought we were observing them.”

“ Hush !” quoth he, turning his head another way ; “ I suspect the Stoic’s eye has already caught us.”

Hearing this, I should of course have looked, after the example of the Centurion, in another direction ; but I know not if you have experienced what I have oftentimes done, that, as if under the influence of some serpentine fascination, one’s eyes are in such situations extremely apt to rest themselves just on the object which most

of all they should avoid. And so it was with me; for, instead of looking away, I perversely directed my eyes right upon the philosopher, who was so near that he could not possibly mistake me, or dream of my mistaking him for any one but himself. And he also, perhaps fascinated like myself in the style of which I have been speaking, although it was too evident that the sight of me was extremely unwelcome, appeared, nevertheless, to be constrained to keep his optics fixed upon me,—insomuch that I could not refrain from saluting him, to which he replied by a very low bow, and an unfortunate attempt towards a smile of courtesy. The widow, who could not help seeing what passed between us, saluted me also, but with an air of considerable confusion, for the blood mounted into her face, and suffused, for a moment, with deep crimson, both her neck and arms; and altogether, it was manifest that our recognition of her in such a situation, and in such com-

pany, had affected her with much perturbation. The Centurion, however, who had by this time turned round again, no sooner saw that the ice was broken, than in he plunged with a volley of dashing compliments—betraying in nothing either surprise, or any extraordinary species of feeling, beyond what is common when acquaintances chance to fall in with each other fortuitously.

“ All hail,” said he, “ fair lady ! and all hail, most reverend friend Xerophrastes ! What a beautiful moonlight evening this is ? Come, no shyness, old cock of Hymettus ; foot it away, foot it away, man ! The lady will never have courage, if you don’t give her your hand. Come now, and remember, my good friend, that even although you be a Stoic, you are an Athenian into the bargain. Come, polite sage, hop on, and convince us that philosophy has not quite washed out your original urbanity and elegance.”

There was always so much good nature in the manner of the worthy Centurion, that it was almost impossible for any one to be offended even by his sarcasms. His broad ruddy face seemed made for the very habitation of smiles; his lips were ever wreathed with benignity, not to be mistaken; and the tones of his voice were so rich and easy, that Thersites himself would not have dared to suspect them of malice. Yet Xerophrates, on this occasion, appeared to be by no means delighted with the style of his salutation. A frown passed very darkly over his forehead, and he turned to the blushing lady with an air of the highest impatience. She, on her part, although she was probably far from deriving any pleasure from what had passed, had the wit to disguise, in some measure, the feelings of her mind. She cast, therefore, a smile of airy and good-humoured rebuke (such at least it was designed to be) upon the mirthful Centurion, and said, "Come, Sabinus, methinks it might become you better to

offer me your hand yourself for this sacred dance, than to play off your jokes so upon Xerophrastes, who cannot help himself any more than the rest of us. Come, Centurion, I insist upon having your company."

"My dear lady," quoth the Centurion, advancing close to Rubellia, "you well know that my services are always at your disposal; but it seems to me that you are already engaged for this dance; and I am sure you will break the heart of Xerophrastes, if you disappoint him, now that he has tightened his girdle, and plucked up his mantle, and made so many preparations. No, no; the luck is his for this time, and don't let him be deprived of it.—You see how conscientious I am, my dear Stoic; no more words, I pray you. Lead forth your fair partner; and Valerius and I, since we can do no better, shall follow in your train."

Xerophrastes heard all this with a countenance but little mollified. He turned, however, once more to the lady; and then

forcing another smile, and gathering up the folds of his upper garment, no longer hesitated. She gave her hand therefore to the Sage, and both catching the beat of the instruments, forthwith sprung into the open place, and advanced with the usual motions towards the statue of the Goddess. There was a good deal of constraint, it is not to be denied, in the manner of the lady ; yet, on the whole, she acquitted herself in a style that bespoke her familiarity with all graceful exercises. But it was far otherwise with the stately disciple of the Porch, who, although he displayed brawny limbs, and abundance of agility after a fashion, yet executed every movement in a way so unequivocally rustic, that not a few of the youthful bystanders were not to be restrained from tittering, when they contemplated his clumsiness.

“ Well done, well done,” quoth one.

“ The rhetorician for ever !” cried another, clapping his hands.

“ Take care, Master Philosopher,” quoth a third ; “ your mantle is sweeping up all the dust.”

Xerophrastes, hearing this last ejaculation, could not help looking behind him to see as to the condition of his garments ; and then the titter became universal ; for the truth is, he had them drawn up very tightly, and indeed much higher than was at all necessary, even for the full exhibition of his limbs. With less than Stoical equanimity did he regard the crowd of laughers behind him ; and, of a truth, the last part of his dancing was yet more awkward than the first. The munificence of Rubellia, however, gained to her all the applauses of the sacred functionaries. The tiara'd heads were bowed in reverence before her ; and she and her companion, after having deposited their contributions, were cheered out of the circle with a most cordial peal of drum, horn, and trumpet.

While this peal yet continued in all its

vociferation, the jolly Centurion touched me gaily on the elbow, and saying, "Now for it, Valerius; have you your sesterces ready," leaped forth with a most warlike and determined air, having his hands stuck in his sides, and causing the folds of his sagum to vibrate in a wonderful manner, by the potent exercitation of his well-strung muscles. The contrast between the reluctant clumsiness of the sulky philosopher, and the ready and well-satisfied hilarity of his successor, was by no means lost upon the multitude of spectators; insomuch, that the very first appearance of the new performer was greeted by an universal clapping of hands, and every other manifestation of delight. Instead of being offended by their mirth, the Prætorian distributed his smiles on every side; and observing a buxom young woman in one corner, who seemed afraid to trust herself before so many eyes, he, without interrupting his step, took her gallantly by the hand, and so perform-

ed the rest of the dance in a manner which yet more increased the satisfaction of all who were looking on it. The girl had a few pence in her hand ; but the Centurion would not permit her to pay any thing, laying down himself a double ransom, and saying, perhaps rather too audibly, “ No, no, pretty maid ; you have given enough to the Goddess, since she has beheld your blushes.”

The maiden’s blushes were probably not diminished by all this courtesy from a person of such figure ; but, however that might be, even the priests of Cybele were well pleased with the Centurion, and I think that his good-humour procured for him a parting salute, not much less violent than had been purchased by all the magnificence of the widow. I know not what it was, that all this while kept me back ; but I could not at the moment, when Sabinus began, gather confidence to begin along with him ; and then his dancing attracted

so much notice, that it would have been a sort of intrusion, had any one ventured to occupy the space till he was done with it. I waited, therefore, in hopes of being able to go forth with some more ordinary group of performers ; but no such opportunity immediately occurred.

One of the next that exhibited himself, was a very red-nosed senator, whose gestures threw even those of Xerophrastes completely into the shade. He appeared to be labouring under the relics of a grievous gout ; for he had his feet wrapped round with I know not how many folds of linen, and whenever he essayed to spring from the ground, one would have thought he had trodden upon some nest of aspicks. His hands meanwhile were held far out from him, and clenched bitterly, and at every successive bound, I could see him grinding his teeth for agony. Whether it had been so, that the man was well known among them, I cannot say ; but if it were

so, his character must certainly have been held in little favour by the multitude ; for to every Sardonian grin of his, the faces round about him replied by shewing all their teeth ; and one of the little boys, following close at his heels, was not withheld by any respect for the laticlave, from imitating all the gestures both of his infirmity and of his ill nature. I took it for granted, that he must needs be some greedy and usurious old extortioner ; and, indeed, the offering he deposited neither sounded very loudly on the basin of the Goddess, nor received any great marks of thankfulness from the music of the priests.

I was just about to follow this ancient, and rejoin my companion, when some one from behind laid hold of my arm, and I heard at the same moment a whisper of “ Valerius—stop, Valerius ; whither are you going ? ” I looked round naturally to see who it was that thus addressed me, and I perceived that he was an old man, wrapped in a very large and deep mantle, the

folds of which, however, were so arranged that I could see very little of his features. I could not for my life imagine who this could be ; but the man stepping a pace or two backwards beckoned to me with his hand, and I, suspecting no evil, immediately followed him. Seeing me move towards him, he drew back yet farther, and ascended a few steps which conducted to the portico of the adjoining house. I hesitated for a moment ; but his inviting gesture being repeated, I also entered within the shade of the pillars, and then the old man dropping his mantle on his shoulders, said, “ Valerius, do you not remember me ? We met last at the tomb of the Sempronii.”

“ At the tomb of the Sempronii !” said I ; and gazing earnestly upon him, I recognized, indeed, the features of the Christian priest, who had treated me on that eventful evening with so much courtesy ; but my surprise was great, as you may believe, to find him in such a situation ; for I myself had seen him conveyed away between

armed guards, and I could not imagine by what means he, of all others, should have so soon regained his freedom.

He observed my astonishment, and gently smiling, said, in a low voice, " My dear friend, perhaps I might have as much reason to be surprised with seeing you here, as you have in seeing me. But follow me into this house, where, I assure you, you shall be both safe and welcome, and where we may communicate to each other whatever particulars have occurred."

The hope of perhaps hearing something concerning Athanasia determined me. I cast a look towards Sabinus, and saw him in the front row on the other side, attentively engaged in witnessing the performance. In short, I had no means of giving him any information, and hoping that he might continue to amuse himself so for a few minutes longer, I permitted the old man to lead me into the vestibule of the mansion. The slaves, who were waiting there, seemed to receive him with much respect ; and he, on

his part, had the air of being familiar with them. He passed them, saying, "Do not trouble yourselves—I shall rejoin your master"—walked before me up stairs—and shortly ushered me into a chamber situated over the hall of entrance, where a grave and elderly personage was reclining close by the open window, which looked out upon the crowded and noisy street. Our host perceived not our approach till we had come close up to his couch, for he was occupied with what was going on without, and the clamours of the Didymæan music might have easily drowned a noise much more obtrusive than that of our footsteps.

But when the old man accosted him, and said, "Pontius, I have been successful. Here is my friend, young Valerius," the stranger rose up, and saluted me with the greatest kindness.

"I fear Valerius will think he has done but indifferently in exchanging a scene of so much gaiety, for the conversation of

two quiet old men ; however, he will pardon me for being desirous of seeing him here, when he learns that I was one of his father's oldest friends, and served with him many campaigns, both in Germany and Britain. I should have been ill pleased had I heard that Valerius had been in Rome, and had departed without my having an opportunity of retracing in him, as I now do, the image of my old comrade."

There was something so kindly in the manner in which these words were uttered, that I could not help being much gratified ; as, indeed, who is not gratified when he hears affectionate commemoration of a departed parent ? I answered, therefore, in terms correspondent to my feelings ; but I could not help being all the while exceedingly curious to know something of the connection between Pontius and the old Christian, and I think my curiosity was not so well disguised as to escape the notice of either of them. A wine-flask, however,

stood upon the table, and I was constrained to pledge the old friend of my father in a cup of excellent Falernian, and to listen and reply to not a few questions concerning the situation of my mother and myself, before I could lead the conversation into the channel I desired ; and at length, indeed, it was not so much any thing I said, as the readiness of the old priest himself, which gave to it that direction ; for the very first pause that occurred in the discourse between Pontius and myself, he filled up, by saying, “ And now will Valerius pardon me for asking, if he has ever looked again into the narrative of Luke, or whether his curiosity, in regard to these matters, has been entirely satisfied by the adventures of one unfortunate night ?”

The manner in which Pontius regarded me when the priest said this, left me no doubt that he himself had embraced, or was at least favourably inclined to the opinions of the Christians ; so I answered without hesitation,

“ My curiosity, instead of being satisfied by what I saw that evening, received new strength ; but you may easily believe that the troubles in which I was involved, and still more the troubles with which I know some others yet to be surrounded, have hitherto taken away from me both the means and the power of gratifying my curiosity as I would wish.—But tell me, I pray you, by what means is your imprisonment at an end ?”

“ My friend,” replied the priest, “ you speak naturally but rashly. I believe you yourself are the only one of those surprised in the tower, whose imprisonment has as yet terminated. Yet hope, good hope is not absent,—above all, I trust there is no reason to despair concerning that dear child who interfered in your behalf, when a rash, a bold, and, I fear me, a false man, had drawn his weapon to your peril. As for me, I have but gained the liberty of an hour or two, and long ere morning’s dawn, I shall be restored again to my fetters.”

“Your fetters!” said I; “excuse me, but you speak in a manner which entirely perplexes me. Am I to understand, that, by the connivance of a Roman jailor, you are this night at liberty to perambulate the streets of Rome? Who is the man that has virtue enough to place so much reliance on your promise?”

“Young man,” answered the priest, “he is a Christian.”

“Even for his sake,” said I, “the name is honourable.”

The old man smiled when I said this, and then, as if correcting himself, looked very gravely upon me, and said, “Valerius, I pray you speak not things which may hereafter give pain to your memory. Already you have read something of the life of ONE, for whose sake our name is indeed honourable—of Him I trust you shall ere long both read and think more; but in the mean time speak cautiously, I pray you, and remember, that where mercy is most abundant, offence is most unworthy.”

“ Felix,” interrupted Pontius, “ you speak too seriously concerning an involuntary and unconscious error. Valerius meant only to express his admiration of the jailor’s behaviour.”

I nodded assent to this ; and the old man again smiling reverently after his fashion, went on, saying, “ You must even pardon the jealousy of an old servant (however unworthy) for the honour of his master. In truth, the man hath conducted himself both like a Roman and a Christian, and most surely his generosity shall draw no evil on his head. But how shall I bless God, that threw my lot, since captivity it was to be, into a place where such authority as this was to have the superintendance of me. Yet more, how shall I be sufficiently grateful, that She, in all things so delicate, although in nothing fearful, has shared the same blessing. In the worst, it is, indeed, true, that there is an eye to regard the faithful, and an arm to sustain them—but when I think what might have been—when

I think that some brutal ruffian, and some gloomy dungeon might have received my beautiful, my innocent child"——

"Heavens," said I, "what do I hear!— Is Athanasia indeed lodged in the same prison with yourself, and is she also thus favoured?"

"I thank my God and hers," replied the old man, "that it is even so. The rest of those that were taken with us, have been dispersed I know not where; but ever since that time she and I have been under the roof of this our brother."

"And may she also go abroad thus freely?"

"Valerius," he replied, "you are much mistaken if you think that I embrace such freedom for my own sake, or for any purposes of mine own. What I do for the service to which I am bound, think not that Athanasia will ever desire to do for herself. She abides her time patiently where the lot hath been cast for her; in due season, if such

be the will of the Lord, she shall regain that in truth, of which this is but the shadow."

"God grant our prayer," said Pontius, "and not ours only, but the prayer of all that know her, and have heard of this calamity!"

"I think," he continued, turning to me—"I think my brother mentioned, that he had met you, along with Athanasia, at the villa of her uncle."—

I bowed assent, and he proceeded.

"Whatever the exertions of her family and their friends can accomplish, most surely shall not be wanting. Would that those who are linked to her by ties yet more sacred had the power, as they have the will, to serve her! Yet Hope must never be rejected. The lamp yet burns on, and who knows what the investigations of this very night may produce? The true accomplices of Cotilius must, of necessity, I think, be discovered; and then Trajan will be satisfied that the Christians stand guiltless, at least of that treason. Let us wait patiently, and hope ever the best."

“ Alas !” said I, turning myself round to the priest, “ what avails it to speak of hoping ? If to follow this faith be a crime, how can any one hope to follow it without being continually liable to accidents at least as unfortunate ? In Rome, at all events, what madness is it thus to tempt the fate which impends over the discovery of that which it must be so difficult, so impossible to conceal ?—Why, supposing you to be at liberty once more, why do you not abandon the capital, and seek some retreat where privacy might be more attainable—where that might be done in safety which here cannot be without the continual presence, at least without the continual dread, of peril ?”

The old man heard me speak all these things (which I did hurriedly and vehemently) with a countenance of the utmost gravity. When I stopped he said nothing, but laid his finger on his lips in token of silence, and pointed with his other hand to the open window by which we were sitting. I listen-

ed, and heard distinctly the shrill voices of the Priests of Cybele, as they brake forth above the choral murmurs of the drums and cymbals, and I perceived that the bloody legend of Atys was once more the subject of their song. The old man held his finger steady on his lip, and I could comprehend the words of their strain quite as well as if I had been close to them upon the street.

But, as the dark rites of that Idæan superstition have never penetrated into our island, I cannot hope to give you any notion of the wild and gloomy impression which their mode of chaunting such words as these is calculated to produce. You will understand, however, that the first part was always done slowly and solemnly, and that, in the latter, the voices of the priests ran rapidly and violently over the notes.

“ Black—black and lazy rolls Eurymedon
 (The great Pamphylian river) to the sea ;
 Full many a dusky shadow rests thereon,
 From rock and old impending hoary tree.

“ Upon the margin of the heavy stream,
 With rustling oak-leaves scatter'd red and sear,
 Stands the wan Phrygian boy, as in a dream,
 Worn out and wasted with his wild career.

“ Above him, like a pale and shivering sprite,
 The moon glides in the melancholy sky ;
 While ever and anon the winds of night,
 Amidst the bare bleak branches, groan and sigh.

“ How long, mad Atys, wilt thou stand,
 With fixed eye and folded hand ;
 Nor hear what terrors are behind
 On the dreary mourning wind ?
 Mother, 'tis not the voice of the black river,
 Rolling slow to ocean ever—
 Mother, 'tis not the whisper of the breeze
 To the grey brotherhood of trees.
 On flows the wave, the night-blast swells and dies ;
 But, vainly from thy Car, mad Atys flies !”

The ancient waited till the voices were drowned again in the clamour of the instruments, and then said to me, “ Young man, do you know to what horrid story these words of theirs refer ? Do you know what sounds all these are designed to imitate ?

Do you know what terror—what flight—what blood—what madness are here set forth in honour of a cruel demon—or rather, I should say, for the gain of these miserable and maimed hirelings? Do you know all these things, and yet give counsel of flight and of cowardice to me, upon whose head the hand of Christ's holy apostle hath been laid? Truly, it becometh well the appointed leaders to turn back and flee, when they perceive the glittering of the spears of the adversary, and hear the proud shouts of those that provoke them to the onset. Young man, for all her bonds, it is not by such words as these that Athanasia might be wrought upon; God, be sure, hath granted to her youth, tender though it be, such heart and such confidence, as long, long years of trial have with difficulty conferred on others, (less favoured) of his servants."

The moon, which fell full on the old man's countenance as he spoke so, shewed his pale cheek suffused for the moment with a more

than boyish blush, and his eye sparkling not the less brightly because a tear hung translucent within its lids. He paused for a moment, and then, sinking his voice almost into a whisper, and folding his hands before him, he proceeded.

“ Yes, my friend, it is even so ; but Valerius may be excuseable, although he as yet understands little of the feelings his words have perhaps too vehemently aroused. I trust it shall not long be so, and that, if indeed we shall ever be set free from this captivity, we shall have our return to the fellowship of the faithful hailed by a new son and a new brother, not less dear than any from whom we have been separated. Read, my dear Valerius, read and ponder well :—My prayers, and the prayers of one that is far purer than me—they are ever with you. But now since I have introduced you to Pontius, why should I delay here any longer ? He, both for your father’s sake and for your own, and for that of the faith,

(of which you have had some glimpses) will abundantly aid you in all things. Deal not coldly nor distantly with him. I commit you into his hands, as a brand to be snatched from the burning."

Pontius, during this address, reached forth his hand, and grasped mine firmly, as in token of his acquiescence in all the old man expressed. He, on his part, having made an end of what he designed to speak, arose, and, looking into the street, said, "These jugglers have now departed to their dens, and the gaping multitudes that attended them have dispersed. But I still see one person walking up and down, as if expecting somebody, where their dancing took place; and it seems to me that it is the same, Valerius, who was in your company when you walked hither." I looked, and perceived that it was indeed Sabinus; and I heard him whistling to himself, as he walked to and fro on the bright side of the pavement. I therefore bade them adieu hastily, saying,

that I had not thought my friend would have detained himself so long for me. As I was going out, however, I could not help saying to the old priest, "Dear father, when shall I see you again, and when shall I hear further of Athanasia?"

The old man paused for a moment, and then said, "To-morrow, to-morrow at noon-tide, be in the Roman Forum, over against the statue of Numa. You will there find some tidings for you."

"Surely," said I to myself, "this old man will not dare to walk at noon-day in the Forum; but after what I have seen, what shall appear impossible!"

I then rejoined Sabinus, who took my arm without interrupting his whistle, and so we walked briskly towards the house of my kinsman. The Centurion plainly intimated, that he took it for granted I had been engaged in something, which I wished to keep from his knowledge; but such affairs made no great impression on

him ; and after laughing out his laugh, he bade me farewell for the night, close by the portico of Licinius.

CHAPTER III.

IN the morning I found Licinius and his son extremely uneasy, in consequence of the absence of Xerophrastes, who had not returned during the whole of the night; but Sabinus came in while they were talking to me, and narrated, without hesitation, all we had seen and heard both in the garden of Trajan, and at the procession of the Galli. Young Sextus could scarcely be restrained, by respect for his father, from expressing, rather too openly, his satisfaction in the course which the affairs of the disappointed lady appeared to be taking; while the orator himself muttered between his teeth words which I thought boded not

much of good to the ambitious rhetorician. The Centurion alone regarded all these things as matters of mere amusement, or so at least he seemed to regard them ; for, as I have already hinted, I was not without my suspicion, that he was at bottom by no means well pleased with the contemplation of the future splendour of the Stoic.

However, after many jests had been exchanged between Sextus and the Centurion concerning this new-discovered, and apparently very incongruous, amour, Licinius said, he was in so far much relieved by what he had heard, as it satisfied him that both the widow and her lover were now otherwise occupied, than in prosecuting their designs against the niece of his friend Capito.

“ I myself,” he continued, “ was all yesterday, as well as the day before, exerting every means in my power for her extrication from this unfortunate confinement. Cotilius, without question, has indeed been a traitor ; but I believe the Prince himself

is, by this time, well inclined to absolve, not only the young lady, but by far the greater part of those who were taken with her, from any participation in his traitorous and unworthy designs. The charge, however, of which it rests with themselves alone to exculpate themselves, is one of a nature so serious, that it is impossible to contemplate, without much anxiety, the pain to which so many families—above all, the noble and excellent Sempronii—may still, it is but too probable, be exposed. But this day Cotilius will, in all likelihood, pay the last penalty of *his* crimes—and then we shall see what intercession may avail. Would to heaven there were any one who could obtain access to the deluded lady, and prevail with her to do that which would be more effectual than I can hope any intercession to prove.”

I shook my head, and Licinius understood well the meaning of the gesture.—“My dear Valerius,” said he, “I am afraid your apprehensions are indeed far from

being groundless. This infatuation—this dream—this madness—is, indeed, a just source of fear ; and yet, why should we suppose its sway to be already so deeply confirmed in a breast so young, so ingenuous, so full, according to every report, of every thing modest, gentle, and submissive ? Surely this amiable, affectionate girl cannot be insensible to the affliction of those who love her the best.—But you still shake your head, Valerius ; well, it is in our hands to do what we can ; as for the issue, who can hope to divert Trajan from doing that which he believes to be just ? Our best hope is in his justice”——

“ And in his clemency,” interrupted the Centurion.

“ Yes, yes, and in his clemency ; you will scarcely persuade me that Cæsar can meditate any thing serious concerning an innocent young girl, who has been guilty of nothing but a little superstition and enthusiasm. Nobody will confound her case with

that of any obstinate old fanatic. Great Jove! it is not to be believed but that she shall have many happy days yet, to see the nonsense of all these Jewish visions, and to forget them. In the mean time, what avails it to distress ourselves more than is necessary? Licinius is able to do something, and he will do whatever he can; and as for Valerius, it is my humble opinion, that the best thing he can do, is to get on horseback, and go with Sextus and myself to the river side, where the Emperor is to review this morning the two cohorts that have just arrived from Calabria. They say they are in fine condition, and I have several old comrades among them, whom I have not seen for these three years."

Young Sextus, who was on all occasions very fond of military spectacles, embraced with gladness this proposal of the ever-active Centurion; and very fain would they both have prevailed on me to accede to it likewise. I knew, however, that it would

be impossible, if I accompanied them, to keep my appointment with the old Christian; and that I was resolved on no account to forego. I told them, therefore, that I must needs spend the morning in writing to my friends in Britain, and so retired to my chamber, there to await the approach of the hour at which I had made promise to be in the Forum. I spent the time till it drew near, in perusing once more (which I now did with greater composure and reflection, but with no diminution either of interest or admiration,) the volume which had been given to me by Thraso, and restored to me again by Athanasia. This volume, and the letter which I have before mentioned, I placed together in my bosom, before I went forth into the city.

I entered the Forum, and found it, as formerly, thronged with multitudes of busy litigants and idle spectators. A greater concourse, indeed, than was usual, crowded not it only, but all the avenues to it, and all the

neighbouring streets, by reason of a solemn embassy from the Parthian, which was to have audience of Trajan that day, in presence of the Senate. The rumour of this oriental pageant (for it was noised abroad, that the ambassadors brought many splendid gifts in their train) had attracted the loungers of the baths and porticos of the Palatine, and all were waiting for the moment when the Prince should return from the Martian Field, with the newly arrived cohorts, and take his place in the Temple of Concord, where the Parthians were to be received. But I, for my part, had no sooner discovered the statue of Numa Pompilius than I resolved to abide close by it, lest, being mingled in the tumult of the expecting multitudes, I should, by any mischance, escape the notice of the old man, who, I doubted not, meant to seek me there in person. The time, however, went on—senator after senator entered the portico of the temple—and, at last, the shouts of the people announced that Trajan himself had arrived there. And im-

mediately after he had gone in, the stately pomp of the Parthian embassy appeared in view, and every eye was fixed upon the long line of slaves, laden with cloth of gold and rich merchandise, and upon the beautiful troop of snow-white horses, which pawed the ground, in magnificent caparisons, before the gate of the Senate-house. But, when the trumpets had blown a salute, which I understood to signify that the ambassadors themselves drew near, and all were yet more earnestly intent upon the spectacle, I observed a little fair-haired girl, standing over against me, by the base of the statue, who, after looking at me for some moments, came close to me, and said with great modesty, " Sir, if you be Caius Valerius, I pray you, follow me, and I shall bring you to the friend whom you have expected."

I signified that I was the man she sought, and that I was prepared to attend her; and then the little girl cast her eyes upwards on the left hand, where the cliff and towers of the Capitol overlook the edifices of the Fo-

rum. My eyes instantly followed the direction of hers, and I saw, high up, in one of the overhanging towers, a white handkerchief waved once and again from a window. My companion held up her right hand, I could not help thinking as if in answer to this signal, but she said nothing, and I walked by her side in silence. We proceeded between the arches, and so up the hanging stairs, and, in a word, had soon reached the level of the Capitol, from whence, looking back, I could perceive the whole array of the forensic multitudes far below me, and hear the noise of their shouting, quite softened by the distance. The child paused with me for a moment at the summit of the ascent, and then, still saying nothing, conducted me across two magnificent squares, and round about the great Temple of Jupiter, until, at length, she stopped at one of the side doors of an edifice, which, from the manner in which it was guarded, I already suspected to be the great prison, which is also called the Mammertine.

The girl knocked, and he who kept the gate, saluting her cheerfully, allowed us to pass without question into the interior of the prison. My companion then took a key from her girdle, and herself opening a door on the right hand of the inner court, tripped before me along many passages, and up many stairs, till we reached at length a part of the building, which was arranged in such a manner, that I could with difficulty believe it to belong to a place of confinement and punishment. She ushered me into a convenient antichamber, and then left me, saying, "Sit down, sir, if it please you, and I will tell my father that you are come."

The little damsel had not been gone above a minute or two, ere a door, different from that by which I had come into the chamber, was opened, and the old priest (whose name, if I have not before mentioned it, was Aurelius Felix) entered, along with a mild-looking man of middle age, whom he desired me to salute as the keeper of the prison, saying, "Here, Valerius, is that Silo,

of whom yesterday evening you spake with so great admiration. But I hope the benevolence of a Christian will ere long cease to be an object of so much wonder in your eyes."

"My father," said the jailor, "methinks you yourself say too much about such little things. But, in the meantime, let us ask Valerius if he has heard any thing of what what has been determined by Cæsar."—

I answered by telling what I had just heard from Licinius; upon which the countenance of the old man was not a little lightened; but Silo fixed his eyes upon the ground, and, I thought, seemed to regard the matter very seriously. He said, however, after a pause, "So far, at least, it is well. Let us hope that the calumnies which have been detected, may turn more and more of discredit upon those that have gone abroad concerning that which is dearer to you, my father, and to all your true companions, than any thing of what men call their own. But,

alas! these, after all, are but poor tidings for us to carry to our dear young lady."

"Fear not," answered Aurelius, "have I not told you already oftentimes, that strength of heart goes not with bone and sinew, and that my gentle child is prepared for all things? She also well knows that the servant is not greater than his master."

So saying, the old man motioned to us to remain where we were, and withdrew again by the same door at which he had entered. I sate for some minutes by the side of Silo, who continued to look downwards, and who was, indeed, manifestly much troubled by the news which I had brought. After a space, he arose and walked very dejectedly back and forwards in my presence, but still said not a word, until at length the same modest little damsel opened the door by which the old priest had departed, and said, "Father, Aurelius is in the lady's chamber, and he desired me to bring Valerius."

The father, smiling mournfully upon his child, pointed to me as if to bid me follow her, and I prepared to do so, but he himself continued where he was, still walking to and fro, as if lost in meditation.

The child led me, therefore, into the adjoining chamber, and tapped gently at a door on the other side of it. The voice of the old priest bade us come in, and Athanasia, who had been sitting by his side, arose with him to receive me. She was dressed in a simple white tunic, her hair was braided in dark folds upon her forehead, her countenance was calm, and, but for the paleness of her lips, and a certain something that was just visible in her eyes, I should have said that her gravity scarcely partook of sadness. When, however, we had exchanged our salutations, it was evident that some effort had been necessary for all this appearance of serenity; for her voice trembled when she spoke to me,—yes, her voice trembled in every tone, and, as she stooped to caress my young

guide, who had sate down by her feet upon the ground, I saw the tear that had been gathering drop heavily, and lose itself among the bright clusters of the little damsel's hair.

The girl, in the meantime, perceiving nothing of Athanasia's trouble, continued to play with a linnet which sate upon her finger, and to imitate, after her childish fashion, the notes of the bird. From time to time she turned round, as if to attract the lady's notice to the beauty of her favourite, and lifted upwards her smiling eyes, the pure azure of which reflected the careless glee of innocence. But, at length, another and another drop fell full upon the cheek of the damsel, and then she looked upwards more steadily, and, seeing that, in truth, Athanasia wept, her own eyes began immediately to overflow with the ready tears of childhood. Athanasia pressed the girl to her bosom, and made one struggle more—but it would not do—for her heart was running to the brim, and, at last, with one passionate sob, all the sluices gave way, and

she was dissolved at once in a flood of weeping. I took her unresisting hand, and imitated as best I could, the language of that consolation, which, alas! I had not to give. But it seemed as if my poor whispers only served to increase the misery they were meant to still. She stooped, and covered her face with her hands, and sobs and tears were mingled together, and the blood glowed red in her neck, in the deep agony of her lamentation.

I looked round, and saw that the old priest was moved at first scarcely less than myself by all this sorrowful sight. Yet the calmness of age deserted him not long, and after a moment there remained nothing on his countenance, but the gravity and the tenderness of compassion. He arose from his seat, and without saying a single word either to Athanasia or to myself, walked quietly towards the end of the apartment, from which when he returned, after a brief space, there was an ancient volume held open in his hand. Still, without

addressing us, the old man resumed his seat, which was right over against the disconsolate maiden, and immediately, in a voice touched—and but touched—with tremour, he began to read aloud, in the Greek tongue, words which were then new, and which have ever since been in a peculiar manner dear to me. You, my friends, know them well; and surely none are to be found in all the Scriptures more beautiful than those sacred words of the Royal Poet of the Hebrews.

“God,” said the old man, and his voice gained strength from every word as he uttered it,—“God is our refuge and strength: a very present help in trouble.

“Therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed; though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;

“Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled;

“Though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”

Athanasia took her hands from her face, and gradually composing herself, looked through her tears upon the old man as he proceeded.

“ There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God ;

“ The holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High ;

“ God is in the midst of her.

“ She shall not be moved ;

“ God shall help her, and that right early.

“ The heathen raged ; the kingdoms were moved ;

“ He uttered his voice ; the earth melted.

“ The Lord of Hosts is with us ;

“ The God of Jacob is our refuge.”

The blood had mounted high in the countenance of Aurelius, and his voice had become strong and full, ere he reached these last words of triumphant confidence. The tears also had been all dried up on the pale cheek of Athanasia ; and although her

voice was not heard, I saw that her lips moved fervently along with those of the fervent priest. Even in me who knew not well from whence they proceeded, the words of the royal prophet produced I know not what of buoyance and of emotion, and perhaps my lips, too, had involuntarily essayed to follow them; for when he paused from his reading, the old man turned to me with a face full of benignity, and said, "Yes, Valerius, it is even so; Homer, Pindar, Æschylus—these, indeed, can stir the blood; but it is such poetry as this that alone can sooth in sorrow, and strengthen in the hour of tribulation. Your vain-glorious Greeks called all men barbarians but themselves; and yet these words, and thousands not less precious than these, consoled the afflictions, and ennobled the triumphs of the chosen people of the race of Israel long, long years, ere ever the boasted melody of Ionian or Doric verses had been heard of. From this alone, young man,

you may judge what measure of candour inhabits along with the disdain of our proud enemies,—how fairly, without question, or opportunity of defence, the charge of barbarity is heaped upon what they are pleased to call our *superstition*,—how wisely the learned and the powerful of the earth have combined in this league against the truth which they know not,—of which they fear or despise the knowledge.” The old man paused for a moment, and then laying his hand upon the volume that was open before him, and casting his eyes upwards, said, in a deep and earnest whisper, “ Surely the truth is mighty, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her.”

“ But, alas! my dear father,” said Athanasia, “ I fear me this is not the place, nor the situation, in which Valerius might be most likely to listen to your words. It may be that his own narrow escape, to say nothing of our present danger, has rendered him even more cautious than he was before.”

“ And who, my dear child,” he replied hastily,—“ and who is he that shall dare to blame caution, or to preach, above all in such things as these, the rashness that is of folly? No, no; Valerius will not believe that we, like the miserable creatures whose impious songs we heard last night together, are studious only of working upon the fears of the ignorant, and harassing, with dark and lying dreams, the imaginations of the simple. Here, (he laid his hand once more upon the sacred volume,)—*Here* are no wild stories of blood-thirsty deities, and self-sacrificing maniacs. *Here* all is plain—clear—perspicuous. *Here* is that which Socrates vainly sought by all the ingenuity of reason. *Here* is that of which some faint and mysterious anticipations would appear to have been shadowed forth in the sublime obscurity of the visions of Plato. *Here* is that which, as that Mighty Martyr that died in this very city hath said, innumerable prophets and kings of the old time desired to see, and yet saw

not. Do nothing rashly, young man ; but it is possible, as you yourself well know, that this may be the last opportunity I shall ever have of speaking with you ; and therefore, before we part, I must needs charge you solemnly, that henceforth you are not one of those who are altogether ignorant ; and that if your knowledge increase not, the sin shall be upon your head. I charge you, Valerius, (he rose from his seat as he spake,) I charge you, that when you return once more to your native island, you blot not out from your memory the things that you have seen and heard in this great city of light and of darkness. Examine—judge—ask aid, and aid shall not be refused you—but I charge you, as your soul is precious, I charge you once more, young man, neither to overlook in carelessness, nor to reject in rashness. I take Athanasia to witness for me, that I have given you the warning that is needful.”

“ Oh, sir !” said Athanasia, “ I am sure

it shall not be in vain that you have done so. I am sure Valerius will never forget this hour"——

She gazed in my face as she said so, and a tear was again visible, dimming the clear dark crystal of her eye, yet on all her countenance there was no other semblance of passion—all besides was calm, serene, heroic; one lucid drop alone was there to tinge the majesty of resignation with the human grace of melancholy. The venerable Aurelius looked upon her with the pride and the pity of a father, and clasping his old thin hands together, whispered, (for I think he had no power to say it more aloud)—“ Would to God that I were here alone ! Shall the axe be laid to the root of the fair young tree that hath but begun to blossom, when so many old trunks stand around withered with the lightnings, and sore broken by the winds !—The will of the Lord be done.”

“ Amen ! Amen ! ” said Athanasia, ta-

king the old man by the hand, and smiling, I think, more cheerfully than I had yet seen her—"My dear father," she continued, "I fear you yourself, after all, are teaching Valerius to take but a sad farewell of us."

"Alas! my child," he replied, "he must have a hard heart that could look unmoved on that sweet face in this hour of sadness. But cheer up, my child, we must not forget that we are in the hands of a greater than Trajan. If so it please Him, all may yet go well with us even here upon the earth. You may live to see many happy years among your kindred—and I, (the old man smiled most serenely,) and for me, my gray hairs may be laid in bloodless dust. Once more, my noble maiden, the will of the Lord be done. God forbid that we should be choosers for ourselves—whatever cup awaits us, blessed be the name of the Lord!"

So saying, the old man retired from the chamber, and once more I was left alone in

the presence of Athanasia. I took from my bosom the book and the letter which I had placed there, and laid them upon her knee. She broke the seal, and read hastily what Thraso had written, and then concealed the scroll within her tunic, saying, "Alas! Valerius, little did the brave old soldier suspect how soon his peril was to be mine—Will you permit me like him to make you my messenger?—will you seek out my cousin, my sister, and tell Sempronia in what condition you have found me?—no, not in what you found—but in what you now see me. Will you go, Valerius, and speak comfort to my poor friend? Her pity, at least, I am sure is mingled with no angry thoughts; and yet she only has reason to complain, for her secret thoughts were not hid from me, and alas! I concealed mine from her."

"I have already seen her," said I, "and you do her no more than justice. But, indeed, Sempronius himself thinks of you even as gently as his daughter."

“ I doubt it not, Valerius; but, alas! there are many others besides these; and I know not what relic of weakness it is, but methinks I could have borne the worst more easily, had it not been for what I picture to myself of their resentment. The priestess—I dread that priestess—Alas! I am cut off for ever from the memory of my kindred.”

“ Weep not again,” said I, “ if you pity me, weep not. Oh, Athanasia! why did you save me from the sword of that Cotilius? Miserable day, that I first opened my eyes upon Rome—and, oh! most miserable hour, that first”——

“ Nay, nay,” she interrupted me—“ Lament not that which is past, and which never can be recalled.” In saying so she walked towards the window of the apartment, and I followed her footsteps. She threw open the lattice, as if that she might inhale the free air, and her eyes wandered to and fro over all the magnificent prospect that lay stretched out below us—the temples and high porticos of the Forum—the gleam-

ing battlements and long arcades of the Palatine—the baths, and theatres, and circuses between and the river—yellow Tiber winding away among the fields and groves—far beyond the blue ridges of the silent hills—and the clear sky of Italy extending over all things its beaming arch of splendour. We were far above the Forum, and when the trumpets were blown by the gate of the Senate-house, the sound floated upwards to us as gently as if had been borne over the waters. The shouts of the multitude were heard echoed, and faintly re-echoed from the towers and the rocks. The princely pageant shewed like a pomp of pigmies; spear and helmet, and eagle glittered together, almost like dews upon the distant herbage. Athanasia looked and listened for a moment, and then rested her eye once more upon the wide range of the campaign, where green fields and dark forests were spread out in interminable succession—away towards the northern region and the visible mountains. She raised her hand, and

pointed to the verge of the horizon, and said to me, “ Valerius, your home lies far away yonder. I must give you something which you shall promise me to carry with you to Britain—and preserve there, in memory—in memory—of Rome.”

Before I had time to make any answer, she had turned from me, and taken out of a casket that stood upon the table beside which she had been sitting, a scroll of parchment, bound with a silk ribbon, which she immediately put into my hands, and—“ To-morrow,” said she, “ Valerius, our fate, they tell us, must at length be determined ;—if we share the fate of Thraso, the last gift of Thraso shall be yours. If, however, any mercy be extended to us, I cannot part with that memorial of a dying martyr. I must keep to myself the old man’s favourite volume, for it was for me he had designed it. But, in the meantime, you see that I have taken care that you shall not be a loser. I have made a copy of the same book for

yourself. I have written it since I came hither, Valerius, and you must not despise it because the Mammertine has not furnished the finest of materials. Take this, Valerius, and take with it my thanks—my prayers. I know you will not forget my message to my dear sister.—Sextus and she—may many happy days be theirs—and yours.”

I kissed the sad gift, and placed it in my bosom.

“Valerius,” she said, “dear Valerius, you weep, you weep;—now, dry up your tears, Caius, for I cannot bear to see you weep. You weep for me because I am a Christian; but forget not that the old Roman blood flows in my veins, and think not that its current is chilled, because I have foresworn the worship of idol and demon, and am in peril for the service of The Living God. You think I am but an enthusiastic girl, not knowing either what I have left, or what I have embraced—and you pity me as a victim of ignorance”——

“God forbid,” said I,—“I weep for you, Athanasia, but not for you alone. Alas! here is no time for ceremony, and silence breaks my heart—I love you, Athanasia; you know that I love you, and yet you tear my heart-strings by speaking to me as if I were a stranger. Lady,” said I, for the first effort was every thing,—“you must forgive me—you must pardon me. Had the world gone fairly, I know not when I should have dared to say such things to you—I know not if I ever should have dared. But now—nay, look not so calmly upon me, for that is worst of all—*now*, alas, what avails it whether I keep the ways of the world, or desert them utterly, as all fair hopes have deserted me? I ask nothing—I hope nothing—but I could not bear to part from you thus, and not to tell you that when I part from you, I bid farewell to all things. Pardon me—once more pardon me.”

Athanasia kept her eye upon me quite stedfastly, while I poured out these wild words ; but her hand was placed in mine all the while, and I felt it cold and trembling. A single flush of crimson passed over her face, and then that, too, was as pale as marble, and I saw her lips move, but the syllables died ere they were uttered. She continued for a moment gazing so, and pale and trembling ; and then at last she fell upon my bosom and wept—not audibly—but I felt her tears.

My Athanasia was still folded to my bosom, in that strange agony of sorrow and of confidence, when Silo, the jailor, entered the apartment, abrupt and breathless.

“ Oh, sir !” said he, “ your sufferings are mine—but it is necessary that you should leave us, and on the instant, for the Prefect is already at the gate, and unquestionably he will examine every part of the prison ; and should you be recognised as the person who was taken in the Monument,

you see plainly to what suspicions it might give rise. Come then, sir, and let me secure your escape—we shall take care to warn you of whatever occurs, and we shall send for you, if there be opportunity.”

Athanasia recovered herself almost instantly, when she heard what Silo said.

“ We shall meet again,” said I.

“ At least once more,” replied she—“ at least once more, Valerius.”

And I tore myself away from her ; and the jailor having once again committed me to the guidance of his child, I was in a few moments conducted to the same postern by which I had been introduced. In a word, I found myself in the court of the Capitol, at the instant when the Prefect, with all his attendants, was entering by the main gate of the Mammertine.

The day was by this time considerably advanced, and I hastened homewards, in hopes of finding Licinius, and having some conversation with him in private before the hour of supper. When I reached his house,

however, I was told that he was still absent ; and found at the same time a billet upon the table, which informed me that Sabinus had carried Sextus with him to his quarters, and that both expected I would join them there immediately upon my return. I knew not how to refuse compliance, and yet I could not bear the thought of being so far from the Capitol, in case of any message being sent to me from the prison. Since I could do no better, however, I charged Boto to remain in my apartment till sunset, and bring me, without delay, any letter or messenger that might arrive in my absence. Should none such appear within that space, I gave him a note, which I desired him to deliver into the hands of Silo ; and having, as I thought, furnished him with sufficient directions how to discharge this commission, I myself took the path to the Prætorian Camp, where I was sure at least of kindness, if not of consolation.

You will wonder, indeed, when I tell you, what is, nevertheless, most true, that

I felt less need of consolation at that moment, than I had done at any one time during the several busy and unhappy days that had just passed over my head. In vain should I seek to explain to you from what strange mysterious workings of my mind it came to be so. Divine them if you can—think of me as you please—but there were moments in which, as I walked along towards the residence of Sabinus, I felt—yes—in spite of all the darkness that surrounded the fate of my Athanasia—I felt as if some new light had streamed upon my path—as if some weight of intolerable lead had been lifted from my bosom—as if a heart dry and parched had been suddenly plunged in some current of life and refreshment—as if sorrow had faded into a phantom, and my lips had been taught some secret irresistible charm, by which the envious shade could for ever be chased into darkness.

No, I speak rashly ; I paint it brighter than it was. There was still upon me the

sense of something cold, black, grasping ; I could not forget for a moment that reality lay frowning around me ; fear hung over me like an evil bird, with wide, strong, hovering wings ; gulphs lay open before me—deep gulphs, from which my eye turned like a coward. Yet all was not darkness—all was not heaviness. Despair was not. A beam—a healing beam had penetrated the thick gloom of the tempest—a rainbow hung glittering in calm brightness athwart the blackest places of the heaven—one pure azure spot gleamed steadily between the darkness of the lowering clouds. I knew that Athanasia loved me—utter misery could no longer be mine—I had no right to be miserable. Death itself could not dry up the tears that had been shed upon my bosom. Oh, the pride and the inalienable happiness of youthful love ! No affliction, no terror, has power to take away its buoyancy of blessedness ; the memory of it is the inexhaustible treasure of

the soul; the vision of young tenderness hovers day and night before the dim eye of age; and Hope and Faith sit like two white-robed angels by the restoring Tomb.

CHAPTER IV.

STRANGE as all this may appear to you, it was therefore with (comparatively speaking) something of a lightened heart that I passed along the Mounds of Tarquin, beyond which, as I have already told you, the Prætorian Camp is situated. When I drew near to the Camp itself, and came within sight of the guard-house where I had visited Thraso, and of the old fig-tree beneath which I had recognised Athanasia, it is true, the darker picture prevailed for a moment over all the light I had been able to see, or to fancy. Nevertheless, even these sad memorials could not effectually compete with the natural elements of hope that

were so strong within me ; and even Sabinus, who was by no means the closest of observers, said, the moment I entered his apartment, that he was quite sure I had heard good news of my law-suit ; or else, he added in a whisper, of some affair almost as interesting to me.

When I told him, in reply to this, where I had been, and in what condition I had left Athanasia, the countenance of the good-natured Centurion immediately fell, and he said, “ Well, my dear Caius, I am glad to see that you have at least learned one good thing since you came to Rome ; and that is, not to let your face lie open like a text-book, for every booby to read your thoughts upon. Let us hope, however, my dear boy, that you may not long have occasion for putting any such lessons in practice—at least, not in the way you are now doing. To-night or to-morrow, we shall certainly know the best or the worst of it ; and in the meantime, you must play the soldier

among soldiers, and remember that Anacreon is your only true camp oracle."

He concluded the sentence with one of his usual whistles, in which there was perhaps more of hilarity than of music, and, beating time with his heel upon the ground, chaunted the merry lines of the Teian reprobate,

" To-morrow comes ; while here I sit,
What have I to do with it ?"

A grey-haired Tribune, with one eye, and a thin yellow face, seamed all over with wrinkles, walked, or rather halted, into the room at that moment, and took the strain out of the mouth of the jolly Centurion,—squeaking very dolefully,

" Why, oh why, when joy is here—
When the sky is bright and clear—
Why be dreaming about sorrow,
And clouds that come not till to-morrow ?"

After having quavered with an air of great self-satisfaction upon the last note of

which, the old gentleman said, "Come, Sabinus, there is no time to be lost; there is to be such a crowd to-day, that if you wish your friends to sit near the master of the feast, you had better adjourn to the Julius; I looked into the kitchen as I came along."

"Of course you did, Tribune," interrupted Sabinus, laughing.

"I looked into the kitchen," he proceeded—"and you may laugh if you please at the news I have to tell you, but, by the genius of Trajan, I never saw such a boar since I was born. By Jove, what firmness! what a beautiful brown! 'tis a most illustrious boar!"

"You speak like a very Antony," quoth the Centurion; "but come, boys, since it is so, I know not why we should linger. I am glad that the camp is not to be disgraced by the supper—and as to the wine—I say nothing—but, I believe, Tribune, we can shew them something."

So saying, these two commanders led us into the great banquetting-room, where several of those high-fed warriors, who had more than once disposed of the empire, were already reclining upon rich couches around the board on which this tusked charmer was expected to make his appearance. Sextus and I obeyed the directions of our host, and took our places, not without some feelings of humility, in the presence of those lordly personages, whose effeminate exterior would, perhaps, have made them less formidable in my eyes, had I not remembered the youth of the great Cæsar, the Parthian retreat of Antony, and the recent death of Otho.†

There were present, besides these luxurious soldiers, a few casual visitors like ourselves, who seemed quite as fond of good eating as any of the rest ; among others, a

——Catonem

† Novisti moriens vincere, mollis Otho. &c.

sleek Flamen, who reclined on the right hand of the presiding Tribune, and a little bald Greek, who seemed to think it incumbent upon himself to fill up every pause in the conversation, by malicious anecdotes or sarcasms, of which last it was easy to see that the Flamen opposite to him was very frequently the subject. That sacred character, on his part, so long as the supper lasted, did not appear to give himself much trouble about any thing the Greek chose to say ; his eye seldom wandered from his cover, unless when it was in search of some particular sauce or condiment ; and if he interrupted his eating now and then, it was only for the purpose of sipping a little out of a certain richly-chased goblet, that stood within easy reach of his fingers. The Greek, on the other hand, became every moment more and more free in his remarks, and even hazarded a few jokes, which it was impossible not to consider as extremely irreligious in their tendency. Neither wit nor impiety, however, could make any im-

pression upon the smooth-faced Flamen, who seemed to think, if one might judge from his behaviour, that the most acceptable service he could render to the deities, was to do full and devout justice to the gifts of their benevolence. There was so much of seriousness in the good man's style both of eating and of drinking, that one could scarcely suspect him of being actuated by feelings of a less dignified nature. The scene, nevertheless, appeared to furnish infinite amusement to the spectators; above all, to that extremely fat and short-necked commander, who acted as master of the revels;—who laughed so heartily every now and then, that his face looked black rather than purple, and that I could not help thinking there was some ground for what I heard whispered, more than once, among some of his juniors. Perhaps I need scarcely add, that the word *apoplexy* was one of those I overheard.

A very animated discussion concerning the review of the newly-arrived cohorts,

(which, I have told you, had taken place that morning by the river side,) relieved for some time the patient Flamen from the attacks of this irreverent person, and engaged the zealous participation of those who had hitherto been the most silent of the company. Sabinus, among the rest, was ready with a world of remarks upon the equipments, the manœuvres, the merits and the demerits of the troops in question; but something he said was quite at variance with the sentiments of one of his brother Centurions, who disputed with him rather warmly, than successfully, for a few moments, and at last ended with saying,—
“ But why should I take so much trouble to discuss the matter with you, who, we all know, were thinking of other matters, and saw not much more of the review than if you had been a hundred miles off from it?”

The Centurion coloured a little, and laughed, as it seemed to me, with rather less

heartiness than usual ; but the disputant pursuing his advantage, said, “ Yes, yes, you may laugh if you will ; but do you think we are all blind, or do you suppose we are not acquainted with certain particulars ? Well, some people dislike the Suburra, but, for my part, I agree with Sabinus ; I think it is one of the genteelest places in Rome, and that there are some of the snuggest houses in it too—and if old men will die, for me, I protest, I don’t see why young men should not succeed them.”

The Centurion laughed again, and natural ruddiness of complexion was, I thought, scarcely quite sufficient to account for the flush on his countenance, as he listened to these inuendos. But the master of the feast cut the matter short, by saying that he had a health to propose, and that he expected all present should receive it with honour.—“ Here,” said he, “ is to the fair lady Rubellia, who is never absent when the Prætorians turn out, and may all things

fair and fortunate attend her now and hereafter."

I pledged the toast as in duty bound, and whispered to Sabinus,—“ My friend, I think you have really some reason for blushing—Oh, fie ! to go and make table-talk of it so immediately. If you had no pity on Xerophrastes, you might at least have had some for the pretty widow.”

He made no answer to this, and looked, if possible, more confused than ever ; but, just at that moment, a soldier came in, and delivered a billet to the presiding Tribune, who handed it to Sabinus immediately after he had read it, and said, loud enough to be heard by all those who sate near him, “ I wish the Prince would give some of this work to these new comers. But, indeed, I wonder what Lictors are good for now-a-days. I think the Prætorians might be spared such jobs as this ; but every thing that these Christians are any way concerned in seems to be a matter of importance.”

Sabinus, having read the billet, handed it back again to the Tribune, and said aloud, “So *exit* Cotilius!—well, and so we must play the chorus to the falling of his curtain.”

The Tribune shrugged his shoulders, whispered something into the ear of the messenger, and then, dashing more wine into his cup, said, “By Joye, it is my most humble opinion, that Rome will never be a quiet place, nor the prætorian helmet a comfortable head-piece, till these barbarians be extirpated.”

The Flamen tossed off a full goblet, and, smiting with his hand upon the table, said, “There spake a true Roman, and a worshipper of the Gods. I rejoyce to find that there is still some religion in the world; for, what with skulking Jews on the one hand, and bold blasphemous Cyrenæans on the other, so help me, Jupiter, the general prospect is dark enough!”

“In my opinion,” quoth the bald Greek, putting on an air of some gravity, and staring

the Flamen full in the face, “In my humble opinion, the Jews will have the better of the Cyrenæans. Indeed, I should not be much surprised to see this Christian superstition supplant every other.”

The Flamen half started from his seat, and opened his eyes as if rage had half strangled him—but his wrath was speechless, and he sate down again to devour it.

“You observe, gentlemen,” proceeded the Greek, in a tone of the most perfect composure,—“you observe what great advantage any new superstition has over any thing of the same sort that is old. We all know, for example, that Isis and Cybele have for many years past left comparatively few worshippers to Mars, Apollo,—even to Jupiter.”

The Flamen, with a face on fire, twisted himself on his seat. The Greek perceived that he had at last touched him in a tender place, and, conveying additional solemnity into his visage, pursued his triumph.

“It is, indeed, most melancholy, most lamentable,” quoth he ; “but it is neverthe-

less most true. I have heard, that unless upon some very great day, a gift is now quite a rarity upon the altar of any of the true ancient deities of Rome. Egypt and Mont Ida have done this; and, upon my word, I don't see why Palestine should not succeed as well as either of them; for I suppose cant and buffoonery are pretty much the same things all the world over. In the meantime, the enlightened contemplate every different manifestation of the superstitious principle with equal indifference; and, I confess to you, I have been a little surprised to perceive how far Trajan is from imitating their example. But that Chæronæan master of his, that Plutarch, was always a perfect old woman; and I fear the Prince has not been able to shake off the impression of his ridiculous stories. They say, the old proser has become a priest himself (I forget of what deity) since he returned to his village. It were well if he contented himself with imposing upon those rustics; but it is rather too much to think of such a

person having any influence with the master of the empire—and such a master, too, as Trajan !”

“ Hush, hush !” quoth the master of the day, “ you forget in what company you are; and, besides, if it please you, you must remember that nothing can be said here against either Trajan or his friends ; and, as for Plutarch, let me tell you, I remember Plutarch very well ; and he was—whatever you may say of him—he was one of the pleasantest fellows that I ever met with.”

“ I doubt it not—I doubt it not,” cried the Greek, perceiving that he had carried the thing too far.

“ You doubt it not, sir?” quoth the Flamen at length, recovering the use of his tongue, “ I am glad, I assure you, that there is any thing you don't doubt. But answer me one thing, Master Believer, do you believe that your body and your soul are made of the same clay ? do you believe there is any after state, in which the faults of the *now* shall be corrected ?”

“My dear Flamen,” answered he, relapsing into his old tone, “I suppose you don’t yourself believe that every thing is as well as it might be?”

“No, sir,” quoth the other, very shortly, “I believe no such thing; and I never was less inclined to believe it, I promise you.”

“The day may come, then,” resumed the bald man, with an air of great sagacity, “the day may come when Falernian shall sparkle ready for drinking in the rivers—when thrushes shall hop about the trees broiled and trussed—and when man—perfected being!—shall say to the lamprey, hissing in the pan, ‘My friend, I think that side of you will do now; pray turn round, if it please you, and do you, mellow offspring of the olive, take care you don’t let him stick to the brass.’ Gentlemen, the Flamen and I are, after all, you see, quite at one as to these matters.”

The younger Prætorians laughed heartily along with the satirical Greek; but the Flamen looked deadly pale for rage, and

held his lips so firmly together, that I suppose he wished us to see he would have thought it profanation for him to address one word more to such a person as this scoffer. Sabinus alone appeared desirous of restoring the harmony of the assembly, and called forthwith on the same musical brother, who had come into his apartment before supper, to join him in entertaining the company with a song. The old gentleman required much sollicitation, and said fifty times over, that he was a little hoarse; but, nevertheless, he was audibly clearing his throat all the while, and he at last announced his consent to attempt the singing of the female part, in the beautiful duet of Horace and Lydia. Sabinus, on his part, was always ready with the best he could do; and accordingly began to roar out, without hesitation, in his usual boisterous fashion, the tender words of regret and expostulation, which the most elegant of poets has ascribed to himself. The delicate half-squeaking, half-murmuring response of the

wrinkled representative of the inconstant Lydia, afforded a contrast irresistibly ludicrous, to the rough guard-house vociferation of the ever jovial Sabinus. But to the ill-suppressed mirth of the party my good-natured friend listened with the most perfect composure. He had turned the thoughts of his comrades into a new channel, which was all he had wished to do ; and nothing could afflict him less, than the idea that he had accomplished his benevolent purpose at the expence of being a little laughed at. He concluded, however, with proposing a bumper to the charming Lydia ; and so, it must be confessed, continued to leave the best part of the burden on the shoulders of his companion.

All, in short, were once more in perfect good humour, when another soldier appeared behind the couch of the president, and handed to him what seemed to be another billet of the same complexion with the former one. He tossed the paper as before to my friend, who changed colour, and looked

very serious as he read it. He looked to me very earnestly, as he was about to return it, and I could not help asking him, if it was any thing that concerned me.

“ My dear Caius,” he said in a whisper, “ now do not alarm yourself—for, after all, it may be nothing ; but an additional guard is ordered to the Palatine, and the reason is said to be, that the rest of the Christian prisoners are to be examined by the Emperor himself.”

“ And when—for the sake of Heaven—when, Sabinus ?”

“ Now, now—this very evening—an hour hence. For Heaven’s sake, compose yourself, my dear boy.—Would you retire to my apartment ?”

I mastered myself as well as I could, and resolved, if possible, not to quit the room so very abruptly. I told Sextus, however, what I had heard, and desired him not to be astonished, if I should ere long make my escape. The poor boy shared visibly in all my agitation ; but I had scarcely had

a moment to compose myself, when one of the slaves, that were in attendance, whispered to me, that a person wished to speak with me in the anti-chamber. Sabinus insisted upon accompanying me—Sextus did the same—and we all three, having made our excuses, hastened to the hall, where my messenger was expecting me.

It was Dromo, and he stood panting for breath.

“ Sir,” said he, “ I have no time for explanation. Silo wishes to see you, and instantly ;—I left Boto along with him at the Mammertine.”

“ Run,” said Sextus ; “ let us run, my dear Caius. Sabinus and I will both go along with you.”

“ No, no,” said Dromo ; “ nobody must go along with him but myself—no one else can be of any use ; and as for the Centurion, the guard is already waiting for him in the court.”

“ Ha !” said Sabinus—“ so very speedily do they attend me ? Run, then, run, my

dear Valerius. I shall be at the Palatine on the instant ; and be sure I shall come to you the moment the watch is out. Run, and remember what I said to you. Forget not that you are a man, and a Roman.”

So saying, the Centurion took his sword and helmet, and before Dromo and I were beyond the precincts of the Camp, we saw him mounted, and at the head of his squadron. They passed us a few yards beyond the gate, and although we pursued them hastily, the beat of hoofs, and the ring of armour, were soon far beyond our hearing.

CHAPTER V.

MOVING at this rapid pace, we had come within sight of the towers of the Capitol, ere Dromo declared himself no longer able to sustain the same exertion.

“ And after all,” said he, looking to the west, from which the last blush of sunset had not yet entirely passed away—“ after all, we shall be in good time. We shall find Silo and Boto still together ; for the hour is not yet come at which the prisoners were ordered to the Palatine.”

I made some inquiry, why it was that Boto had not come to me himself, and received an explanation which I must give

to you more briefly than Dromo gave it to me. You must know then, that Boto, mistrusting his own recollection of my instructions, had requested Dromo to assist him in finding his way to the Mammertine; and it was so that the Cretan had come to be witness of a scene, which, in spite of all his sarcastic disposition, he could not narrate to me without many tokens of sympathy. I think I mentioned to you once before, that my faithful slave, in coming with me to Rome, had indulged the hope of meeting once more with his brother, who, many years before our journey took place, had been carried off from Britain in the train of a Roman officer of distinction. I smiled, when the poor man expressed to me his ignorant confidence, that his brother would certainly find him out, ere he had been many days in the metropolis of the world. But now, as it turned out, a fortunate accident had abundantly recompensed him for many hours of ill-regulated search.

He had found his brother, and he had found him in the Mammertine. In a word, the British bondsman had been one of the luckiest of men ; and the brother of my own slave was no other than that humane Silo, to whose kindness I, and one dearer to me than myself, had already been so deeply indebted. The Cretan, himself a slave, and an exile long banished from his kindred, described, in a tone of melancholy interest, a scene which, in itself, must have exhibited almost as much of sorrow as of joy. He had partaken in all the feelings of the long-lost brothers, and hastened to bring me from the Prætorian camp, that Boto might be spared the pain of immediately parting from him whom he had just found in a manner so unlooked for, and in a condition so far above his expectations. “ And yet,” said he, “ I had some difficulty in prevailing on Boto to permit me to do this ; for, after his first transports were over, it seemed to be the most fervent wish of his heart to be able to

tell you of his good fortune, and present to you his brother.”

But I have no time at present to tell you more of what passed between me and the Cretan. The red tints of the western sky were every moment becoming faint and more faint, and I hurried along the darkening street, and up the ascent of the Capitoline, scarce listening to the story, which, at any other moment, I need not tell you, would have commanded all my attention, and all my sympathy. We reached the summit, and found the magnificent courts and the Temple of Jupiter already occupied by various detachments of mounted soldiers. I hastened, between their scattered groupes, on to the gate of the Mammertine, and, at the moment when I had reached it, recognized, at some distance, the strong voice of Sabinus calling out, “Stand, Eagle;—comrades, close up!” The horn sounded as he spake, as if in echo to the command, and, before the postern opened to admit us, the Prætorian squadron had formed themselves into a compact line,

right over against the great gate of the prison. I saw Sabinus take his place at the head of the array, and ran to speak to him. "My dear Caius," said he, stooping on his horse, "would to heaven I had been spared this duty! Cotilius comes forth this moment, and then we go back to the Palatine; and I fear—I fear we are to guard thither your Athanasia. If you wish to enter the prison, hasten your steps; and may you be stronger than you hope. Go, go, my dear boy," he added. "By Jove, I had rather pursue the Parthian!—but what must be must." He squeezed my hand, and I hastened away from him. Dromo stood along with the door-keeper at the open postern, and we glided into the prison, which was now no longer silent, as I had found it in the morning, but resounding in all its courts and arches with bustle and hurry, and the noise of fatal preparation.

We had scarcely entered the inner-court ere Sabinus also, and about a score of his Prætorians, rode into it by the main approach.

Silo and Boto were standing together ; and both had already hastened towards me ; but the jailor, seeing the Centurion, was constrained to part from me almost before I had time to take him by the hand, or to lift up my poor Boto, who, not I think without tears, had embraced my knees the instant he perceived me. His brother, however, who seemed scarcely less affected than he, attended not Sabinus till he had whispered a single word in my ear,—“ Oh ! sir, now, more than ever, how does all this torture me ! Pity me, for I also am most wretched. But you know the way—here, take this key—hasten to the apartment which you know—and oh ! spare yourself at least the needless pain of witnessing this scene of blood, which—would to God it were the last—Oh ! sir, let me not entreat you in vain ; hasten to my dear lady, and tell her—for I have not the heart to do so—what commands have come to us from Trajan.”

Alas ! said I to myself, of what tidings am I doomed ever to be the messenger !—

but Athanasia was alone; and how could I shrink from any pain that might perhaps alleviate hers. I took the key the kind jailor offered me—I left the court, which was now blazing with the light of torches, and ringing with the muster of men and horses—I glided hastily along the dim corridors of the Mam̄mertine, and stood once more at the door of the chamber in which I had parted from my Athanasia. No voice answered to my knock; I repeated it three times, and then, agitated with indistinct apprehension, hesitated no longer to open it. No lamp was burning within the chamber, but through one of its two windows, both of which stood open to receive the mild air of the evening, there entered a wavering glare of deep saffron-coloured light, which shewed me Athanasia extended on her couch, her head pillowed upon her left arm, and her right hand buried in the mazes of her dark hair, which lay loose and dishevelled upon her placid bosom. I say placid, for, fierce and unnatural as was the inconstant gleam

that passed and repassed over her features, its ominous and troubled hue had no power to mar the image of her sleeping tranquillity. There lay she, her large serene eye-lids closed in their calmness upon orbs that were so soon to be awakened upon all the fierceness of peril—all the gloom of terror. A smile—a sweet composed smile sate on her virgin lips, and her tunic scarce betrayed the modest heaving of her bosom. I hung over her for a moment, and was about—Oh! how unwillingly—to disturb that slumber—perhaps that last slumber of peace and innocence—when the chamber-walls were visited with a broader, and a yet deeper glare, and my footsteps, I know not by what instinct, were drawn half unconsciously to the window by which the light had access.

“Caius, Caius,” she whispered, as I stepped from beside the couch; “why do you leave me, Valerius; stay, stay, my Valerius.”

I looked back, but her eye-lids were still closed; the same calm smile was upon her

dreaming lips. The light streamed redder and more red—All in an instant became as quiet without as within. I approached the open window, and saw Cotilius standing far below in the midst of the prison-court; the torches all around—the horsemen drawn up in silence on either side—and a single soldier close behind him, resting upon an unsheathed glittering sword, as in expectation of the signal.

Sabinus, meantime, who sate on horseback immediately over against the prisoner, was stooping down and speaking with Silo; but ere I had looked for another moment, he dismissed the jailor, and I saw him nod to the trumpeter, who immediately lifted his trumpet to his mouth. Cotilius shewed, by one rapid gesture, that he understood the meaning of the nod, and seemed to plant himself with more firmness upon his feet, his eye all the while being fixed stedfastly upon the Centurion. The glare of the torches was so strong, that I saw every thing as clearly as if the scene

had passed at noon-day. I saw Cotilius' keen blue eye as fierce as ever—I saw his lips pressed together steadily upon his teeth—I saw that the blood was still fervid in his cheeks, for the complexion of this man was of the same bold and florid brightness so uncommon in Italy, which you have seen represented in the pictures of Sylla, and even the blaze of the torches seemed to strive in vain to heighten its natural scarlet. The trumpet was, as I have said, at the man's lips, and the soldier had lifted his sword from the ground, and my eye was fixed, as if by fascination, upon the bare throat of the prisoner, when suddenly a deep voice was heard amidst the deadly silence, calling several times, "Cotilius! Cotilius!—look up, Cotilius!"

The eye of Cotilius obeyed the summons more slowly than that of any other person who was present there—but at last it did obey it; and he, and I, and all the rest beheld Aurelius Felix, the Christian priest, standing at an open window, not far dis-

tant from that at which I myself was placed; and it was evident to all that it was from the old man's lips the voice had proceeded. Cotilius regarded him stedfastly for a moment, and then resumed his former posture; but the old man called again more loudly than before—"Cotilius, Cotilius!" said he, and he stretched forth his fettered hand as he spake, and the sound of his voice was alike clear, earnest, and solemn—"Cotilius! I charge thee, look upon the hand from which the blessed water of baptism was cast upon thy head. I charge thee, look upon me, and say truly, ere yet the blow be given, upon what hope thy thoughts are fixed?—Is this sword bared against the rebel of Cæsar, or a martyr of Jesus?—I charge thee, speak ere thy blood flows;—and for thy soul's sake, speak truly."

Cotilius kept his eye upon the old man while he was speaking, but I could not observe the least change in the expression of his countenance. When he was done, and

even the soldiers that stood about appeared to be expecting his answer—a single bitter motion of derision passed over his lips, and he nodded, as if impatiently, to the Prætorian whose lips were upon the end of the trumpet. The man blew, and while yet the surrounding arches were echoing the sound, the sword-bearer had executed his office, and the headless trunk fell heavily upon the pavement. Instinctively I turned me on the instant from the bloody spectacle, and my eye rested again upon the couch of Athanasia—but not upon the vision of her tranquillity. The clap with which the body of Cotilius fell upon the smooth stones of the court, had, perhaps, reached the sleeping ear, and we all know with what swiftness thoughts chase thoughts in the wilderness of dreams. So it was that she started in her sleep, at the very moment when the mortal blow was given. The hand that had been slumbering amidst her dishevelled ringlets, was pressed fervently upon her brow, and she whis-

pered—(for it was still but a deep whisper, although there was in its breath the intense earnestness of agony)—the dreaming maid whispered in a tone that chilled my blood, even more than that which I had witnessed —“ Spare me—spare me, Trajan, Cæsar, Prince—have pity—have pity on my youth—I conjure thee to be merciful!”—Then she paused for a moment, and the whisper began again—“ Strengthen, strengthen me, good Lord!—Valerius, we must not lie, Valerius—Fie! fie! we must not lie to save life—Thraso! Thraso! I see him, I see him. It is but a blow—a blow, Valerius—ha! a beast—a tyger—Spare—spare, Trajan—sharp white teeth—how his eyes glare—Thraso—Felix—Valerius, Valerius, come close to me, Caius—come close to me—’Tis not the sun, Caius—no, no, ’tis not the sun—you know ’tis moonlight, and this is brighter than the sun. Valerius, kiss me, kiss me once more, Valerius—are my lips so cold, so very cold?—Fie!—come, come,

let us remember we are Romans—'Tis the trumpet"—

The Prætorian trumpet sounded the march in the court below, and the armed hoofs clanged aloud—and Athanasia, starting from her troubled sleep, gazed wildly around the reddened chamber. The long blast of the trumpet was indeed in her ear—and Valerius hung over her—but after a moment the cloud of the broken dream passed away, and the maiden smiled as she extended her hand to me from the couch, and began to gather up the long loose ringlets that floated all down upon her shoulders. She blushed and smiled mournfully, and asked me hastily whence I came, and for what purpose I had come; but before I could answer, the glare that was yet in the chamber around her, seemed anew to be perplexing her—and she gazed from me to the red walls, and from them to me again—and then once more the trumpet was blown, and the melodious horn replied to

it, and Athanasia sprung from her couch, as if visited with a sudden consciousness that she was somehow concerned in the tumult. I know not in what terms I was essaying to tell her what was the truth, but I know that ere I had said many words, she discovered what was my meaning. For a moment she looked deadly pale, in spite of all the glare of the torch-light ; but she recovered herself in a moment, and said, in a voice that sounded almost as if it came from a light heart,—“ But I must not go thus, Caius, you know I must not go to Cæsar, without having at least a garland on my head.—Where is my pretty little Marcia?—Stay there, Valerius, and I shall be ready anon—quite ready.”

So saying, Athanasia glided away from me, and passed into an adjoining chamber, where I heard her saluted by the jailor's daughter, whom she desired (and she said it gaily too) to trim the lamp, and go fetch the flowers that had been placed in water

in the morning. The little maiden sung cheerily, and seemed to be doing as she was bid, for I could not but hear distinctly whatever passed between them.

It seemed to me as if Athanasia were less hasty than she had promised, yet many minutes elapsed not ere she returned to me, and she brought the lamp too in her hand. "For why," said she, "should I dress myself only for little Marcia, and this Trajan? Do you not see that I have been at pains with myself, and who, think ye, would throw so much trouble away? for, after all, perhaps Trajan may disdain to take notice how a poor girl that has renounced Venus, and blasphemed against the three Graces, may chance to be arrayed when she comes before him." She spoke all this, however, in mere mockery; for the truth is, that she had made no alteration whatever in her dress, excepting only that garland of flowers which I had heard her bid the damsel prepare for her. She plucked one of the

blossoms from her hair as she drew near to me, and said, "Take it, Valerius, you must not refuse me this one token more; and you must know this also is a sacred gift, Valerius, for the Christians love this flower, and cherish it on account of the symbols with which its fair leaves are set forth. Look you, Caius, you must learn never to look upon it without kissing these red streaks—these blessed streaks of the Christian flower."

I took the flower from her hand, and pressed it to my lips; and I remembered that the very first day I saw Athanasia, she had plucked such an one, when apart from all the rest, in one of the dark mossy alleys of the gardens of Capito. I told her what I remembered; it seemed as if the little circumstance I mentioned had called up, in painful vividness, all the image of peaceful days that had passed away, and promised not to be restored again;—for she who had hitherto borne herself so bravely,

replied not to me now without a faltering voice, and once more the visible shade of sorrowfulness gathered like a cloud upon her countenance. If the tear was ready, however, it was not permitted to drop; and Athanasia returned again to the Christian flower with all the usual composure, both of her countenance and of her voice.

“Do you think there are any of them in Britain?” said she; “or do you think that they would grow there? You must try, Caius; you must not leave Rome, without getting some of the roots.—And stay, I should like you to get them where you first saw the flower. You must promise me—indeed you must—that you will go to-morrow—yes, to-morrow, Caius, or next day—or some day, at least, before you think of your departure. You must go to my dear uncle, and he will not refuse you, when you tell him that it is for my sake he is to give you some of the roots of those pretty flowers of his; for he has hundreds of them

all down that old dark alley, where I have wandered so often and plucked them, when no one suspected why I never put rose-buds, nor violets, nor hyacinths, nor any other flower, but only this into my hair. They call it the Passion-flower, Caius—'tis an emblem of an awful thing. Look you here, Caius, these purple streaks are like trickling drops of blood; and here, look ye, they are all round the flower. Is it not very like a bloody crown upon a pale brow? I will take one of them in my hand, too, Caius; and methinks I shall not disgrace myself when I look upon it, even though Trajan should be frowning upon me."

I had not the heart to interrupt her; but heard silently all she said, and I thought she said the words quickly and eagerly, as if she feared to be interrupted.

The old priest came into the chamber while she was yet speaking so, and said very composedly, "Come, my dear child, our friend has sent again for us, and the

soldiers have been waiting already some space, who are to convey us to the Palatine. Come, children, we must part for a moment—perhaps it may be but for a moment—and Valerius may remain here till we return to him. Here, at least, dear Caius, you shall have the earliest tidings, and the surest. Yes, yes, you will stay—all will go well, and we shall be with you again anon.”

In saying these words, the good old man took Athanasia by the hand, and she, smiling now at length more serenely than ever, said only, “Farewell, then, Caius, farewell for a little moment!” And so, drawing her veil over her face, she passed away from before me, giving, I think, more support to the ancient Aurelius than, in her turn, she received from him. I began to follow them, but the priest waved his hand as if to forbid me—the door closed after them, and I was left alone. The thought rushed through my mind—I have seen her—perhaps I have

seen her for the last time—and I felt it pierce my bosom like a sword. I stretched myself upon the couch where Athanasia had reposed—the couch where Athanasia had dreamed of me—where her sleeping lips had murmured my name. I threw myself upon the place where she had lain ; and I would fain have wept, but my throat was dry, and no tears would come.

CHAPTER VI.

I KNOW not, my friends, how to proceed with the narrative of what followed. Thoughts, passions, fears, hopes, succeeding so rapidly, or rather interfused so intensely, give to that strange night, when I look back upon it through the long vista of threescore years, the likeness of some wild, incoherent, fantastic, agonizing dream. Much, without doubt, of what passed within my own mind I have forgotten ; but it seems to me as if what I saw were still present in all the distinctiveness of reality before my eyes,—as if my ears were yet

ringing with the echo of the least whisper that I heard. That chamber in the Mamertine—how impossible is it for me to forget the image of that deserted chamber! Its walls are at this moment before me blazing with the reflection of torch-light, and then again, as I saw them when a few minutes had elapsed, all dim and shadowy—the stars shining feebly upon them from the twilight sky—every thing around lonely and silent as a wilderness, except the voice of Silo's little maiden, which once and again sent to my half unconscious ear a faint and remote echo of innocent infantine lamentation. Whither she had gone to bewail the departure of Athanasia, I knew not; I heard the child singing in a low and melancholy strain; and I arose from the couch, for the calmness of grief had suddenly succeeded to its tumult, and slow softening tears at last bathed my cheeks, as I gazed forth upon the solemn heavens and the wide darkening plain.

“ You are calm, sir,” said the jailor, who had come into the chamber, and stood behind me for a moment or two ere I observed him,—“ you are calm, sir ; I am happy to see that you are calm ;—the prison is now perfectly quiet ; will you walk with me towards the Palatine, that we may at least be near to know what is reported of their proceedings ? My brother will stay here, and take care of my girl till my return.”

“ Oh ! yes, Silo,” said I ; “ for, at least, I shall be better any where than here, and I would fain be in the open air.”

We soon had descended from the Capitoline, passed through the silent Forum, and gained the brow of the opposite eminence, where, as shortly before around the precincts of the Mammertine, all was light and tumult. Every court was guarded with mounted and dismounted soldiery, and groupes of busy men were passing continually, and repassing, about the different gates and porticos of the imperial edifice. We interchanged no words, but I followed

the guidance of Silo, who led me round and round the guarded buildings, apparently endeavouring to discover some traces by which he might conjecture in what part of them the examination of the prisoners was going on.

At last he fixed his eyes upon a certain point, where a more considerable detachment of the Prætorians were stationed, and in the neighbourhood of which there was altogether a greater appearance of light and bustle than elsewhere.

“Do you think they are there?” said I.—“Are you acquainted with the palace, Silo?”

He shook his head in answer. “Am I acquainted with the palace?—Ah! sir, little do you know through what strange vicissitudes of fortune I have passed. You do not know more familiarly the house in which you were born and reared, than I do every corner—every dark corner within these wide walls. But I have not crossed the threshold since the day Cæsar died.”

“Which Cæsar, Silo? Do you mean Nerva, or Domitian, or”——

“Domitian,” he replied, “my master. I was the slave of Domitian, and he gave me my freedom.”

“And you were within the palace on that day, Silo?”

“Yes, sir; I was indeed within the palace. I would have given no little price to be without it. It is not for me to speak against the Prince that freed me. He was kind to his household.”

“Then no man, Silo, is altogether wicked. There was some redeeming thing even about Domitian.”

“Yes, sir; and when he first came to be over all, all hoped fairly of him. But oh, sir! it is a terrible thing to be tried with the temptation of power. I have often thought with myself, that it is like being given up by God into the hands of a cruel dæmon, who, unless you make a glorious conquest, must have his own way in all things,

and will render your human voice nothing but a poor mouth-piece for uttering the imaginations of hell. But then, to be sure, there is the more honour for him that overcomes ; and I thought, till lately, that Trajan had been greatly strengthened. Now, however, you see that God permits even him, whom all call just, humane, and modest, to be blinded also for a time by this devil. I trust it shall not be ever so."

"Silo," said I, "you speak the truth, and you speak it strongly ; I fear, indeed, it is a struggle out of which few hearts could come unmarred. It must indeed be a terrible temptation."

"And then again, sir," quoth he, "I sometimes think it may be compared to the influence of strong wine, which they say does not so much alter men from themselves, as make visible what they really are ; though they be at other times cunning enough to hide that from the eyes of the world. Perhaps it was so with my poor Prince ; but it is not

for me to speak—no, nor is it for any one to speak *now*—for he has gone to render his account, where alone there is just judgment. And speak of these matters how we may, there is at least enough to make one think modestly ; for, oh, sir ! the heart of man is a dark thing to look into ; and ONE, to whom, I know, you will yet cling stedfastly, has said, as perhaps you know already, ‘ Judge not, lest ye be judged.’”

While we were talking thus, Silo all the time kept his eyes fixed, not upon the part of the palace which seemed to be most probably the scene of the examination, but upon a certain long range of building in which, unlike the rest of the Imperial pile, there was no semblance either of light or tumult of any kind. “ Do you see,” said he, observing that my eye followed his,—“ do you take notice of the silence and darkness that prevail all along here ? Well, it was not always thus, sir. I have seen the time when there was light enough here, and when the boldest eye in Rome did not look upon

these arches without as much anxiety as either of us feels now."

"It was here," said I, "that Domitian lived. Is that your meaning?"

"Yes, sir, it was indeed here; and it was here, too, that he died;" and he pointed with his finger to a certain point in the midst of this deserted wing of the palace, where I saw pillars of more than usual magnificence supporting what seemed to be the roof of an open gallery. He paused for a moment, and then said, as if something had suddenly occurred to him, "Will you wait for me here, sir? I must run back to the prison. I must go; but I shall be back again on the instant."

"If it must be so," said I, "go, Silo, and I shall wait for you patiently. Alas! what avails it where we be? It is not with us, Silo, to contend against the Demon of whom we were speaking."

"Nay, sir," he replied, "do not speak so dejectedly so long as hope is not extinguished. I shall be with you again anon."

The jailor left me, not without some little wonder that he should have done so at such a moment. But the things he had been saying had, I know not how, tended in some sort to tranquillize me ; or, perhaps it might be, that, under the shade of those massive walls which had witnessed so many scenes of guilt and blood, and the luxury and the misery of tyrants, a kind of deadening feeling of the presence of Necessity, and of the fruitlessness of Endeavour, and of the vanity of all human things, good and evil, had been breathed upon me, as it were, by the stern Genius of the Place. I made no effort to seek for any intelligence—I never even thought of seeking out Sabinus, although I knew he must be somewhere at no great distance from where I was. I sate down, half in despair, half in resignation, at the foot of one of the brazen statues that were in the midst of the palace-court. I read the inscription upon its base, and found that I had taken my station beneath the image of that proud man who had already transmit-

ted his name to twelve succeeding masters of the world—that great Julius, who first drank the full cup of ambition, and found its dregs bitter. I sate there silent and solitary, beneath that memorial of departed grandeur, contemplating by turns, and in a mood that almost approached to indifference, the deserted scene of the pleasures and the crimes and the sufferings of Domitian, on the one hand—the gorgeous chambers of the magnificent Trajan, on the other,—the array of the imperial soldiers keeping watch at the busy palace-gate—and the shadow of Cæsar’s statue, which lay far out beyond me upon the pavement of the court.

In a word, I had scarcely once reflected upon Silo’s leaving me ere he returned, having evidently in much haste performed his errand (whatever that might have been) to the Mammertine. “Valerius,” said he, “you will at least pardon my absence when you know what was my intention. I suspected when I saw where the chief guard was stationed, and I have since ascertained from

one of the servants of Trajan, that the council is this night sitting in a chamber wherein I have witnessed many strange scenes, such as neither you, nor perhaps any man that is at this moment within the bounds of the Palatine, have the least conception of. Behold this key. I had preserved it by mere accident; but, if you have courage to follow my guidance, I think you will soon confess that the accident was not an unfortunate one."

I could not, for my life, imagine to what the words of Silo tended, but, as I have said already, I had fallen into a mood in which all things seemed almost alike, and I mechanically, rather than upon any course of reflection, signified my readiness to attend the jailor whithersoever it might please him to lead me. He looked cautiously around the court for a moment or two, and then, wrapping his gown closely about him, stepped very quietly towards the termination of the abandoned wing. I moved along with him. We entered beneath a small por-

tico, beside the very threshold of which the grass was every where peeping through between the stones of the pavement ; the key was applied to the gate, and the rusty lock, after one or two trials, yielded to its pressure ; a large empty hall received us, the circumference of which was scarcely visible by the dim light of the newly-risen moon, streaming down from a cupola, which hung far above, open to the sky. The door was hastily closed behind us, and we heard our whispers and our footsteps echoed with a strange distinctness, from the dark high arches around us, as we stepped into the centre of the long-deserted saloon. “Hush, hush,” said Silo, “I am sure there must be some one within hearing ;” and, at that moment, a whole brood of swallows whirred close past us, and, circling and recircling the lofty walls, the startled tenants of the place escaped from the presence of the intruders into the open air over head.

Silo gazed for a moment after them, and threw open—for no key was necessary—the

folding-doors of the first of a long range of chambers which opened upon the saloon. To this the beams of the moon had more access, and their light gleamed broadly here and there upon the heavy hangings of cloth of gold, and shewed, at the same time, the long trailing spider's webs, which had been woven upon their surface, all down from the cornices ; but the windows through which the light found admittance had been long closed upon the air, and there was a feeling of weight and oppression about all the atmosphere of the room. The carpetings lay thick upon the floor, and we glided over them without disturbing the silence.

Another and another chamber we in like manner traversed in succession—all of them equally filled with the signs of magnificence. But at length we came to one much longer than any of these, and furnished in quite a different manner ; for when first its door was opened, there was so much light reflected on every side, that I started, and could not

help thinking we had intruded farther than Silo had intended. A second glance, however, seemed to indicate that we were still in the region of desolation, for a statue lay in the midst of the floor, one of its limbs snapped over, as if it had fallen and been permitted to remain. A table, however, stood not far from the statue, covered with vessels of silver and of porcelain, and it was not till I had come close up to it, that I saw the dust laying thick upon these, and observed how much the lustre of them had been tarnished. Silo, in the mean time, continued as if rivetted to the spot, in the middle of the room, close by the fallen statue, the shattered fragments of which he was, or seemed to be, contemplating.

“Where are we, Silo?” I whispered, “what place is this?—what means the unnatural light that beams from the walls about us?—and what, above all, betoken these strange relics, surrounded with so many symptoms of confusion?”

“ Oh, sir !” he replied, “ did you never hear men speak of the famous Phyngite walls ? I thought all the world had heard of this place.”

“ I never heard of it,” said I, “ nor do I know the meaning of what you say.”

“ Then listen, listen, sir,” he whispered, “ and I will tell you what I thought all men had heard of. This is the place in which alone Domitian used to eat and sleep, and walk about for the last months of his life, when he was jealous of all men that came near him ; and he contrived these walls, covered all over with the shining Ethiopian stone, that no one might be able to approach him without being discovered. The time that has passed since those days, has somewhat dimmed their brightness ; but then, sir, I promise you there was not a bit of all these walls, of which the finest dame in Rome might not have been glad to make her mirror. I swear to you, sir, it was a strange sight to see, how, even when a slave entered with a goblet of wine in his hand,

the poor prince would start and stare around him, as if every side of the chamber had been invaded by some host of men ; and yet, perhaps, it was all the while nothing more than fifty different reflections of one trembling eunuch. Alas ! sir, as I said to you before, it is a fearful thing to be a tyrant. I am sure there was never a boy in all the house, that would have changed pillows any night in all that year with Cæsar ; for it was visible to the least of us, that a whisper or a shadow was enough to discompose his countenance in the midst of all this grandeur.”

“ And where, Silo, did he fall ?”

The jailor pointed with his finger to the broken statue,—“ And look, look here, sir,” he said—“ look upon this shattered piece of marble—it was behind this that they say he ran for safety, when he had felt the first treacherous blow ; but I came not into the chamber till all had long been over, and I saw nothing but the blood upon the floor, and the statue lying here just as it does at

present. Look, yonder in the corner is the couch he slept upon, and he had always a dagger under his head, and he called to the little page that was waiting upon him to fetch it from the place; but they had taken away the blade, and the scabbard only remained; and then in came Parthenius and Claudianus, and the gladiator, and all the rest, and he could make no resistance; and they soon finished what the cunning Stephanus had begun. But, oh, sir! we have seen enough of this terrible chamber; let us go on, for we have not yet reached the place to which I wished to bring you; but it is not far off now."

With this Silo walked to the end of the melancholy chamber, and pressing upon a secret spring, where no door was apparent, opened the way into a room, darker and smaller than any of those through which we had come. He then said to me, "Now, sir, you must not venture upon one whisper more—you touch on the very heart of Domitian's privacy. It is possible that the

place I have been leading you to may have been shut up—it may exist no longer ; but the state in which all things are found here makes me think it more likely that Trajan has never been master of its secret. And in that case, we shall be able both to see and to hear, without being either seen or heard, exactly as Domitian used to do, when there was any council held either in the Mars or the Apollo.”

I started at the boldness of the project, which now, for the first time, I understood ; but we had come a long way, and I was in no mood for hesitation.

Silo laid his finger on his lips again and again as he looked to me,—very cautiously lifted up a piece of the dark-red cloth with which this chamber was hung,—and essayed another secret spring which commanded a very small and narrow door in the panneling beneath. Total darkness appeared to be beyond ; but the jailor motioning to me to remain for a moment where I was,

and to keep up the hanging, glided boldly into the recess. I wondered how he should tread so lightly, that I could not perceive the least echo of his footsteps ; but this no longer surprised me, when I myself had been permitted to follow him, which, after being absent for several moments, he, appearing again at the entrance, and silently beckoning with his finger, invited me to do.

I found myself in a very narrow place, the floor of which felt beneath my foot as if it were stuffed like a pillow ; and, after we had dropped the hanging of the adjoining chamber, every thing was totally dark, as it had at first appeared to me, except only at two points at some distance above my head, and considerably separated the one from the other, where—through divers small apertures, each about the size, it may be, of a human eye—there was visible a ray of light, manifestly artificial. Silo, taking hold of me by the hand, conducted me up some steps towards the nearest of these

places ; and, as I approached it, I heard distinctly the voices of persons talking together in the room from which the light must needs be proceeding. I did not draw my breath, you may well believe me, with much boldness at that moment ; but my eye was soon fixed at one of the apertures, and, after the first dazzle was over, I saw clearly, for my position was close by one of its angles, the whole interior of the illuminated chamber beyond me. Silo took his station close by my side, and locking his arm in mine, gazed as earnestly as I did through another of these loop-holes, which, that you may understand every thing about it, were evidently quite concealed among the rich carved work of the ivory cornice.

The chamber was lighted up splendidly by three tall candelabra of silver, close beside one of which was placed a long table covered with an infinity of scrolls and tablets. One person, who had his back turned towards us, was writing at this table, and two others, in one of whom I instantly re-

cognised the Emperor himself, were walking up and down on the other side, and conversing together as they walked.

“No, Palma,” said Trajan, for it was that old favourite whom he addressed—“I have quite made up my mind as to this matter. I shall never, so long as I live, permit any curious inquisition to be carried on concerning the private opinions of any man. Every man has a right, without question, to think—to believe—exactly what pleases him; and I shall concede as much in favour of every woman, Palma, if you will have it so. But it is totally a different affair, when the fact, no matter how, is forced upon my knowledge, that a subject, no matter who or what he be—a subject of the Roman empire, refuses to comply with the first, the elemental, and the most essential, of all the laws by which the state is regulated. The man—aye or the woman—that confesses in my presence contempt for the deities whom the commonwealth acknowledges in every step of its procedure—that person is a criminal;

and I cannot dismiss him unpunished, without injuring the commonwealth by the display of weakness in its chief. As for these poor fanatics themselves, you do not suppose that I authorise their punishment without the same feelings of compassion which you yourself express ; but it is the penalty of my station that I must controul my feelings, and you well know it is not on such occasions as this alone that I essay to controul them."

" But you are satisfied, my lord," said Palma, " that these people are really quite innocent as to Cotilius's designs ; and as it was upon that suspicion they were apprehended, perhaps it may be possible"—

" Possible !—Yes, Palma," interrupted the Prince ; " quite possible and quite easy, too, provided they will condescend to save themselves by the most trivial acknowledgment of the sort, which, I repeat to you, I do and must consider as absolutely necessary. And women too—and girls forsooth—I suppose you would have me wait

till the very urchins on the street were gathering into knots to discuss the nature of the Gods.—Do you remember what Plato says?

“ No, my lord, I do not know to what you refer.”

“ Why, Plato says that nobody can ever understand any thing accurately about the Deity, and that, if he could, he would have no right to communicate his discoveries to others; the passage is in the *Timæus*, man, and Cicero has translated it besides. And is it to be endured that these modest fanatics are to do every hour what the Platos and the Ciceros spoke of in such terms as these? Why, really, I think you carry your tolerance a little farther than might have been expected from such a devout disciple of the Academy.”

“ I despise them, my lord, as much as yourself; but, to tell you the truth, it is this young lady that moves me to speak thus, and I crave your pardon, if I have

spoken with too much freedom.—Her father was one of the best soldiers Titus had.”

“The more is the pity, Palma. Have you ever seen the girl yourself? Did you give orders that she should be brought hither? I have not the least objection that you should have half an hour, ay, or an hour if you will, to talk with her quietly; perhaps your eloquence may have all the effect we desire.”

“I doubt it, my lord, I greatly doubt it,” he replied; “but, indeed, I know not whether she be yet here—Did you not send to the Mammertine?”

The man writing at the table, to whom this last interrogation was addressed, said, “I believe, sir, both this lady and the old man, that was in the same prison, are now in attendance.” And upon this Trajan and Palma retired together towards the further end of the apartment, where they conversed for some minutes in a tone so low, that

I could not understand any thing of what was said. Trajan at length turned from his favourite with an air, as I thought, of some little displeasure, and said aloud, coming back into the middle of the room,—“ I know perfectly well it is so, Palma ; but what is that to the affair in hand ? I am very sorry for the Sempronii, but I doubt if even they would be so unreasonable as you are.”

“ Will you not see the poor girl yourself, Cæsar ?” said the favourite.

“ Cornelius Palma,” replied the Prince, “ you do not need to be told, that my seeing her would only make it more difficult for me to do that, which, seeing or not seeing her, I know to be my duty. Do you accept of my proposal ? Are you willing to try the effect of your own persuasion ? I promise you, if you succeed, I shall rejoice even more heartily than yourself ; but it is rather too much to imagine that I am personally to interfere about such an affair as

this—an affair which, the more I think of it, seems to me to be the more perfectly contemptible. Nay, do not suppose it is this poor girl I am talking of—I mean the whole of this Jewish, this Christian affair, which does indeed appear to me to be the most bare-faced absurdity, that ever was permitted to disturb the tranquillity of a great empire. Think of it, I pray you, but for a single moment. A mean and savage nation of barbarians have but just suffered the penalty of obstinacy and treachery alike unequalled, and from them—from the scattered embers of this extinguished fire, we are to allow a new flame to be kindled—ay, and that in the very centre of Rome—here—where I speak to you—within sight of my palace. I tell you, that if my own hand were to be scorched in the cause, I would disperse this combustion to the winds of heaven; I tell you, that I stand here Cæsar in the midst of Rome, and that I would rather be chained to the oar, Palma,

or whipped for a slave, than suffer, while the power to prevent it is mine, the least, the tiniest speck to be thrown upon the face of the Roman majesty. By all the Gods, Palma, it is enough to make a man sick to think of the madness that is in this world, and of the iron arguments by which we are compelled to keep those from harming us, that at first sight of them excite no feeling but our pity. But I am weary of these very names of Palestine—Jew—Christian ; and by Jupiter, I must have my ears rid of them. Go to this foolish girl, and try what you can make of her ; but I give you fair warning, that I will have Rome troubled with no breeders of young Christians.”

Trajan whispered something farther into the ear of Palma, and then lifting up one of the books that lay upon the table, retired with it from the chamber, passing as it seemed yet farther into the interior of the palace.

Cornelius Palma, after the Prince was gone, sate down over against the person who was by the writing-table, and leaning with his hand upon his brow, was apparently for some space busied with his reflections upon what he had heard. He then talked in a low and whispering manner with the secretary (for such I supposed him to be,) of Trajan ; but I could catch only a few words, sufficient to indicate that the same affair was still the subject of discussion. The end of it was, that the secretary pointed to a door opposite to that by which his master had departed, and that Palma walked toward it as if about to enter the adjoining chamber. But the moment Silo perceived this, he pulled me by the hand, and, in a word, he soon conducted me to the other end of this closet, where, as I have told you already, the light appeared to find admittance in a similar manner. From that corner another of the imperial apartments was visible in equal distinctness, and the first glance shewed me

Athanasia, and her ancient friend, sitting there quietly together, as if waiting now at length, in entire composure, the moment when they should be summoned into the presence of their judge. The door of the room was opened almost at the same time, by the soldier who guarded it; and Palma entered with an air which might not, perhaps, appear the less alarming, because of its extreme gravity and calmness. The old man and Athanasia both arose to salute him, and he, courteously returning their salutation, beckoned to them both that they should sit down again. He himself leaned his elbow upon the pedestal of one of the busts, that were ranged about the apartment, and after pausing so for some moments, desired the attendant soldier to withdraw for a little, as he had something to say in private to the prisoners.

CHAPTER VII.

THE soldier had withdrawn himself for some moments, ere Palma spoke; and it was evident, from the manner in which he, during this interval, regarded Athanasia, how much he was affected by seeing one so fair, and so young, and so noble, bound with the fetters, and expecting the fate of guilt. As for Aurelius, the Senator scarcely once looked upon him, and I thought when he did so, that there was not only indifference. but something very like distrust and displeasure, in his glance. It was to the old man, nevertheless, that his first words were

addressed. "From what has just been reported to me," he said, "of your behaviour at the execution of the traitor Cotilius, I fear there is nothing to be gained by speaking to *you*, concerning the only means by which your own safety can yet be secured. You are obstinate, old man, in your superstitions? I see by your looks that there is no chance of persuading you."

"Noble Palma," replied the priest, "contempt is the only thing I fear from men. But I thank my God, that it is the only thing I have it in my power to avoid."

"I will not argue with you," answered Palma. "It was not with any purpose of bending you, that I undertook this painful office. I pray you to leave us for a moment, that I may speak in freedom with one whose case is, I trust, less hopeless."

The old priest rose up, and pointed to the fetters that were upon his arms, and said meekly, "I resist in nothing—let them guard me whither it pleases you."

“ Sir,” said Athanasia, “ I pray you let Aurelius remain ; you are much in the wrong, if you imagine that I shall either hear or answer less freely because of my friend being absent.”

“ He will, at least, retire to the other end of the chamber,” said Palma ; “ and remember, that it is not his part to interfere any further.”

The priest retired as he was bidden, and sate down at a considerable distance, with his arms folded upon his breast, and his eyes fixed upon Athanasia. She, on her part, seeing that Palma hesitated, and seemed at a loss how to begin, said to him in a tone of modest composure, “ Noble sir, believe that I am most sensible to the kindness of your meaning ; but if your purpose be indeed as kind as I think it is, I pray you spare me at least the pain that is needless—and spare yourself what I am sure is painful to you. You see my youth and my sex, and it is not unnatural for you

to think as you do ; but know that my faith is fixed, and that I hope I shall not be deserted, when I strive even at the last moment to do it no dishonour."

"This old man," said Palma, "has made you, then, thoroughly a Christian?"

"I would it were so," she answered—"I would to God it were so!"

"The Prince," resumed Palma, "has knowledge both of your father's character, and of the race from which you are sprung, and of the goodness of your own heart, young lady ; and I tell you, that if you persist in this manner, you will give pain, much pain, to more than you have yet thought of—to me, lady—nay, to Trajan himself ;—and, as for your family, have you yet seriously considered into what misery they must be plunged?"

"Oh, sir," she replied, "you mean kindly ; but this is cruel, cruel kindness. I have considered all things. God knows, I have considered well. I have wept, I have pray-

ed ; but, I thank God, I have as yet been sustained, and I trust I shall be so yet farther."

"Lady," answered Palma, "the touch of the physician's knife is painful, yet his hand must not falter ; nor must I shrink from speaking to you. But I have sent for those who, I hope, may speak yet more effectually." So saying, the Senator turned from the place where he had been leaning himself, manifestly much shaken by the behaviour of the maiden. He walked to the other end of the chamber, over against where Aurelius was sitting, and, opening the door, said something which I heard not to the soldier who watched there. He then went and sate down also in a corner of the room ; while Athanasia, having risen up, stood trembling, being much agitated, as was evident, with the expectation of an interview, whose nature, without question, she already in some measure suspected.

Her eye was fixed upon the opened

door of the chamber; and after a moment had elapsed, there entered, even as I had anticipated, both her uncles, Lucius and Velius. Behind them came, wrapped all over in her consecrated veil, the stately Priestess of Apollo; and last of all, gazing wildly and distractedly around, her eyes red with weeping, and all her apparel disordered, the friend of her youth, and the sister of her bosom,—she to whom, in all things save one, her heart had ever been laid open—the beautiful and the miserable Sempronia. The two Sempronii advanced with calm steps, deeply dejected, towards the place where Athanasia stood waiting their approach, as if rooted to the ground. The priestess walked yet more slowly, and lifted, as she walked, the veil from off her face, which was pale, but quite unmoved, so that I knew not well how to interpret its meaning. But, as for poor young Sempronia, when she at last rested her eye upon her friend, and saw the fettered hands, that

were clasped together, as if in agony, upon her bosom, she, poor thing, screamed aloud, dashed the blinding tears from her eyelids, rushed past them all, and was folded at once in the cold embrace of Athanasia—I say, her cold embrace, for, although I saw that she pressed her cousin to her bosom, I saw also that she trembled from head to foot, and that her pale face and dilated eyes were still turned, as if she had no power to take them away, upon those who approached towards her, with steps so much more slow, and with seriousness so much more terrible, at such a moment, even than all the passion of young Sempronia's sympathy.

“My dear Athanasia,” said Lucius, taking her by the hand, “you must not look upon us thus—you cannot think that we are come with any thought of giving you unnecessary pain. We come to you as to a daughter—we think you have done wrong, but we have not forgotten the days that are past.”

“ My poor girl,” said old Velius, “ listen to Lucius, listen to your best friends. Do you put more faith in the words of strangers than in the blood of kindred—the affection of your father’s brothers—the guardians of his dear orphan ?”

“ Woe is me !” said Athanasia—“ O God, strengthen me ! Why, oh ! why, am I forced to wound these kind hearts ! Have pity upon me, have pity upon me—you know not what you speak of, else you would all be silent.”

“ Weep,” said the priestess ; “ yes, weep, and weep largely. There is yet time for you to repent : Abjure this madness ; come, come, and let the last of your tears be shed upon the altars of your paternal Gods, and they also will be merciful. Nay, tremble not when you hear my voice, Athanasia. I love you as tenderly as the rest, and if you have deceived me also, I pardon you—I have long since pardoned you.”

And the priestess stooped where she stood, and imprinted a silent kiss upon the

forehead of the victim ; but she could not stop her tears, which flowed, indeed, like waters from a fountain, all down her marble cheeks, and upon the naked shoulders of young Sempronia, who also still clung around her vehemently—seeing and hearing nothing—inconsolable in anguish.

Athanasia bowed her head, and wept at length audibly, for hitherto her grief had been silent. For a moment or two she wept so, and no one said any thing to interrupt the wholesome relief of nature. But the maiden soon recovered herself, and gently removing the arms of Sempronia, stood erect once more, and calm in the midst of her relations.

“ My friends,” said she, “ you have seen that I do not bear this lightly. But it cannot last for ever. The moments you have to be with me are, without doubt, numbered, and what avails it that they should be spent in speaking and in hearing words that can have no effect ? I am a Christian—I have been baptized in the name of Christ—

I have partaken of the symbols of the Christian mystery—and I have no more power to bring myself out of this peril, than he that stands in the front rank—without sword or buckler—deprived of all things but his honour.”

“ Athanasia,” said Velius, “ alas ! my dear girl, what madness is this that has taken possession of your bosom ? Do you hold yourself wiser than all the wise men, and all the good, and all the great men that have ever lived in Rome ? Do you deem yourself able to penetrate mysteries, from which all the sages of the earth have retreated with reverent humility ? Consider with yourself once more, I pray you, and remember the modesty that might be becoming in your tender years—and, I must speak the truth, your ignorance.”

“ Oh, sir !” she answered, “ little, little do you know my heart, if you think that I have been brought into this place, because of my being puffed up with any emptiness of conceit. I know well that I am a poor,

young, unlearned creature ; but God gives not according to our deserts ; and because I am poor and ignorant, must I therefore reject the promise of his riches, and the great light that has been manifested to me, which, would to God it had also been to you, despite the perils which a dark world has thrown around it.”

“ O, Athanasia !” said young Sempronia, now for the first time opening her lips, “ I know the secrets of your heart, although you have kept from me some of them. Oh think, my dear sister, of all the love that we bear to you—and, oh ! think of Valerius—for I know he is dear to your thoughts—I know you love him.”

“ The more is the sacrifice,” said Athanasia. “ I do love Valerius ; but he also is a Christian—at least I hope in God he will soon be so.”

“ Amen ! amen !” said the old man, who had hitherto been silent.

The priestess turned round when she heard him speaking, and observing that he

also was fettered, and the great stedfastness which was upon his countenance, her sorrow seemed instantly to give place to anger, and she began to reproach the old man bitterly, even as if he alone were to blame for all the danger of Athanasia, and for all the affliction of her kindred.

“Behold,” said she, “old man—behold the end of your work. Look here, and see to what you have conducted the disciple of your phrenzy. Your hairs are grey, your eyes are dim, and your feeble clay is already yearning, it may be, to be sprinkled into ashes.—But look here, cruel, bloody, ruthless apostate! look here, and behold what a victim you have bound along with you to the altar of your madness. Oh! may the Gods that see all things, look into your wicked heart, and have pity and mercy upon the errors of youth—of deceived, ensnared, abused, slaughtered, murdered youth. Oh! yes, old and feeble though you be, may strength be given to you in anger, that you may taste the full struggle and

the true agony. May you be strong to wrestle, that you may fall slowly, and feel your fall! Would to the Gods, just and merciful, that you might struggle and fall alone!"

The old man arose from his seat, when he heard himself thus addressed, and answered calmly, although the fire was kindled in his eye, and his cheek was no longer coloured with the paleness of extenuated age. "Amen! lady," he said; "most surely your last wish is mine. But why is it that you have come hither with cruel words, to embitter equally the last moments of a life that is dear to you, and a life that you despise? Go, leave us where we are; we ask not for your pity, and you have no right to come hither to wound us with your contempt. You speak of ignorance and of deceit. O, little do you know who it is that is ignorant, and who it is that is deceived. We are the servants of the living God, whose light, in spite of all the powers of earth and of hell, will soon shine abroad

among the nations, and quench in utter oblivion the feeble, false, glimmering tapers, fashioned with the hands of men, with which, hitherto, ye have sate contented amidst the darkness, and blessed yourselves as the favoured of the earth. Yes, man may bind with chains, and slay with the sword—but think ye that the spirit is his to do with it what he will?—or think ye, in your vanity, that the chain, and the dungeon, and the sword of man, can alter the course of things that are to be, or shake from its purpose the will of Him, in whom, blind and ignorant, ye refuse to behold the image of the Maker of all things—shutting eyes, and ears, and your proud hearts, and blaspheming against the God of heaven, whose glory ye ascribe to stocks and stones, and to the ghosts of wicked and bloody tyrants, long since mouldered into dust,—and to the sun, and the moon, and the beautiful stars of the sky, which God set there to rule the day, and the night, even as he lets

loose the wind, to scatter the leaves of the forest, and to lift up the waves of the great deep, and send them roaring upon the land? Leave us, I charge you.—The young and the old are alike stedfast, for God is our strength, and he bestows it on them that ask for it in the name of the Redeemer.”

“Peace, blasphemer!” said the priestess; “I serve the altar, and came not hither to hear the Gods of heaven and earth insulted by the lips of old and hardened impiety.—Once more, Athanasia, will you speak the word, and go with us, or will you stay here, and partake the fate of this madman?”

“Oh, God!” said the maiden; “how shall I speak that they may at length hear me!—My dear friends—my dear, dear friends—if you have any love, any compassion, I pray you kiss me once, and bid me farewell kindly, and lay my ashes—when I am no more—in the sepulchre of my father—beside the urn of my dear mo-

ther. I tell you truly, you need not fear that I will disturb the repose of the place—I tell you most truly, that I die not in anger against any one, and that I shall have rest at length when I am relieved from this struggle.—Oh ! pardon me, if in any thing besides this I ever gave you pain—remember none of my offences but this—think of me kindly—And go now, my dear friends, kiss me once each of you ; kiss my lips in love, and leave me to bear that which must be borne, since there is no escape from it but in lying, and in baseness, and in utter perdition here and hereafter. May the Lord strengthen his day soon, and may ye all bless the full day-light, although now ye are startled by the troubled redness of the dawn ! Farewell—kiss me, Velius—kiss me, Lucius—my aunt also will kiss me, for she loves me, too, in spite of all things.”

They did kiss her, and tears were mingled with their embraces, and they said no more, but parted from her where she was ; and

Palma, the Senator, lifted the desolate Sempronia from the ground, on which she had fallen, and he and her father carried her away, apparently quite senseless, with all her black tresses sweeping the pavement as they moved. And so Athanasia and Aurelius were once more left alone in the chamber.

They were alone—and they were close together, for the old man hastened to Athanasia the moment the others had left her. “The moment is come,” said Silo; “now, now, at last, sir, prepare yourself to risk every thing where every thing may be gained.”

He did not whisper this, but spake the words boldly and aloud; and ere I could either answer any thing, or form any guess as to his meaning, he had leaped down from my side, and thrown open, by touching another secret spring, a door, which formed a communication (of course, entirely unsuspected) between our lurking-place and the chamber in which our friends were standing. Silo rushed in, and I followed him.

It was all done so rapidly, that I scarce remember how it was done. I cannot, indeed, forget the wild and vacant stare of Athanasia, the cry which escaped from her lips, nor the fervour with which she sunk into my embrace. But all the rest is like a dream to me. The door closed swiftly behind us ;—swiftly—swiftly I ran, bearing the maiden in my arms through all the long course of those deserted chambers. Door after door flew open before us. All alike, breathless and speechless, we ran on. We reached the last of the chambers, the wide and echoing saloon, ere my heart had recovered from the first palpitation of surprise ; and a moment after we breathed once more the free air of heaven, beneath the pillars of the portico.

“ Stop not,” said I—“ for the sake of God, stop not. Hasten, Silo, it is you that must guide us.”

“ Ha ! said he, “ already have they perceived it ? Great God ! after all, is it in vain ?” He paused as he said so, and we heard dis-

tinctly, voice echoing voice, and the clapping of doors. "Treachery, treachery! Escape, escape!" they shouted at the gates;—and horn and trumpet mingled in the clamour of surprise, wrath, terror.

"Ride, ride," screamed a voice high over all the tumult—"ride, ride this instant, and guard every avenue."

"Search every corner—search the wing of Domitian," cried another.

The horsemen galloped furiously hither and thither across the courts; trumpet, and horn, and cymbal resounded above the shouting of men, and the neighing of the startled chargers.

"We are lost—we are lost," said Silo, clasping his hands upon his brow. "We can never reach the gate, and they must discover every thing on the instant."

"Let us run to the Temple of Apollo," said I—strange to tell, I felt comparatively cool at that moment—"the priestess will at least give shelter to Athanasia—we at least must try her."

“Thank God,” whispered Silo, “there is one chance more.”—And so we began again to run as swiftly as before, and keeping close beneath the shaded wall of the edifice, and then threading, under the guidance of the jailor, many narrow passages of the hanging-gardens of Adonis, we reached, indeed, the adjoining court of the Palatine, and stood, where all was as yet silent and undisturbed, within the broad shadow of the sacred portico. The great gate we tried to open, but it was barred. Athanasia, however, who by this time had recovered herself astonishingly, pointed out a postern at the corner of the portico, and by that we, without further difficulty, gained the interior of the temple.

It was all filled as before, (for here the alternations of day and night made no difference,) with the soft and beautiful radiance proceeding from the tree of lamps. But the fire on the altar of the God burned high and clear, as if very recently trim-

med, and behind its blaze stood one of the ministering damsels, whom I had formerly seen embroidering in company with Athanasia. Her hand held the chain of the censer, and she was swinging it slowly from side to side, while the clouds of fragrant smoke rolled high up above the piercing flames;—and the near light, and the intervening smoke, and the occupation with which she was busied, prevented her from at first perceiving what intrusion had been made on the solitude of the sacred place. Athanasia ran up to her, and clasping the knees of the astonished girl with her fettered hands, began to implore her by the memory of old affection and companionship, and for the sake of all that was dear to her, to give escape, if escape were possible—at least to give concealment. The girl dropped the censer from her hand—she gazed wildly, and stammered incoherently, and seemed to be utterly confused, and unable to guess what was the meaning of what she saw and heard.

“ Lady !” said Silo, rushing forward, and falling down before her by the side of Athanasia—“ Oh, lady ! stand not here considering, for this is the very moment of utmost peril for her—for us—for all of us. For the sake of all that is dear and holy, if you have access to any secret place, lay it open speedily, and the prayers of all that you behold shall for ever be calling down blessings on your head. Behold these fetters—they tell you from what her flight hath been.”

The girl grasped the hands of Athanasia, and gazed upon the manacles, but still seemed quite amazed and stupified ; and while she was yet standing so, and Silo was renewing his entreaties, we heard suddenly some one trying to open the door by which we had entered, and which the jailor had fastened behind us, as soon as we had all crossed the threshold. Once and again a violent hand essayed to undo the bolt, and then all was quiet again. And in a mo-

ment after, the Great Gate of the Temple was itself thrown open, and the priestess of Apollo entered the fane, followed by her two brothers, who supported between them the yet faint and weeping young Sempronia. In a moment Athanasia had rushed across the temple, and strong in the mingled energy of hope and fear, knelt down with her forehead to the ground, her hands clasped together, and her long hair kissing the marble, close by where the feet of her haughty kinswoman were planted.

Surprise held every one dumb for an instant; but it was the priestess who first broke the silence.

“ Athanasia !” said she ; “ rash, unhappy girl, speak, by what magic do I behold you here ? How have you escaped ? and why, having done so, do you choose this place for your retreat ? Think ye, that here, in the Temple of Apollo, the priestess of an insulted God can give shelter to blasphemy flying from the arms of justice ? Ha ! and

he, too, is here!—Old man, what brought thee hither? I think our acquaintance scarce warranted this intrusion. Speak—speak, unhappy girl, and let me understand what all this means—for at present every thing is dark, and I see only that you have brought hither”——

“ Friends, friends—oh! blame them not,” interrupted the maiden—“ Oh! blame them not for doing much—for venturing all to save me. Oh! help us, and help speedily—for they search everywhere, and they will come hither, too, anon.”

“ Come hither?” cried the priestess—“ who, I pray you, will come hither? Ha! run, fly, bolt the door. If Cæsar speaks, I will answer; but at no lower bidding shall I unfold the temple-gate. Ha! methinks you imagine every one may be as venturesome, and as successful as yourself.”

The gate meantime had been made fast, and it was well that it had been so; for scarcely had the priestess made an end of speaking, ere the sound of horses’ feet, and

the ringing of arms, and the voices of angry men, were heard distinctly approaching towards us. In a moment more we could hear them talking together beneath the very portico, and trying, in their turn, to thrust open the massive valves of the temple.

“Who calls there?” cried the priestess in a stern tone—“Who calls and knocks there? If a suppliant approaches, I think he might approach more modestly.”

“Castor! We are no suppliants,” answered a rough voice from without; “but you had better open your door, old dame, and let us see whether the rats have not got to their holes here. It is no use speaking; if you had them baked into a pye, we must see them. Dead or alive, you must give up our pretty Christians. Come, come, my sly masters; yield, yield, there is no flying from Cæsar.”

“Peace, insolents!” quoth the priestess—
“peace, and begone on the instant! This is

the Temple of Apollo, and ye shall find no Christians here, I warrant you."

The man still thundered at the door, however, and she resumed more sternly than ever,—“Wretch, profane outcast, I charge thee once more, be still! Has impiety crept even to the camp? Turn, rude man, and dread the arm that guarded Delphos!”—And saying so, she at length lifted up the fearful Athanasia, and walked, all present following at some little distance, towards the other extremity of the fane, where, as I had occasion once to tell you before, the private chamber of the priestess was situated on the right hand beyond the statue of Apollo. In passing, she stopped for an instant, and, kissing the feet of the statue, seemed to murmur some secret invocation for help—perhaps it might be for pardon. She kept hold of Athanasia's hand all the while, but said not one word either to her or to any of us; while the two uncles and the young Sempronia appeared to be still kept silent by

the surprise with which all these unforeseen things had affected them.

She led us across the chamber in which, on a former day, I had heard Athanasia sing; and in like manner, having taken a lamp in her hand, on through the long passages which conduct towards the receptacle wherein the Sybilline prophecies are said to be preserved. She opened the door, which she had, on that former day, told me, led into the repository of those mysterious scrolls. Two inner-doors appeared before us; that to the left she opened likewise, and we perceived, descending from its threshold, a long dark flight of steps, as if going down into the centre of the rock.—“ Here,” said she, as she paused, and held the lamp over the gloomy perspective—“ here, at last, I leave you, having already done too much, whether I think of the God I serve, or of Trajan, or of myself. But for the blood of kindred not little may be dared. Go with her, since you have come with her—More I

cannot do—Here, take this lamp—the door at the bottom is fastened only from within ; let it fall behind you, and make what speed you may.”

“ One thing,” said Silo, “ had better be done ere you depart ;” and so, very adroitly, he, by means of his jailor’s key, relieved both of them from their fetters. He then turned to me, and said, “ Go no further, Valerius ; you may rest assured that no one suspects us.”

I saw that he designed to return into the courts of the Palatine, and so proceed homewards, as if ignorant of every thing that had occurred : I saw this ; and it was evident that Silo had no other course to pursue, either in duty to himself or to his family. But for me, all my cares were here. I squeezed by the hand both Lucius and Velius, and both warmly returned my pressure. The priestess gave the lamp into my hand, and the door was shut upon us ; and we began, with hearts full of thankfulness, —but not yet composed enough to taste of

lightness—with thankfulness uppermost, I think, in our confused thoughts, and with no steady footsteps, to descend into the unknown abyss, that yawned black and deep before us.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE steps were abrupt and narrow, but in a few minutes our feet became accustomed to them, and we descended rapidly. After we had done so for some time, we found ourselves in a low chamber of oblong form, in the midst of which an iron stake was fixed into the floor, having chains of ponderous workmanship attached to its centre, and over against it, on the one side, a narrow chair of the same metal, and it also immovable. I asked Athanasia to repose herself here for a moment ; for it was evident that the tumultuous evening had much worn out her strength. But she said, shuddering, “ No, no, not here, Valerius ; I never saw

this place before, but the aspect of it recalls to me many fearful stories, and explains the meaning of many dark hints, that, at the time when I heard them, I could not understand. Here, without question, many a poor wretch has expiated his offences against the dignity of the shrine, and the servants of Apollo. I have heard the priestess allude to this dreary place—I cannot bear to stay in it. Aurelius knows, I doubt not, some humble Christian roof, beneath which we may be safe until the first search be over. Let us breathe at least the open air, and God, who has hitherto helped, will not desert us.”

“There you speak rightly,” said Aurelius; “let us not linger here amidst the scenes of darkness and blood. Christian roofs, indeed, are known to me, both humble and lofty, which would gladly shelter us; but how are we to know how far suspicion may already have extended, or why should we run any needless risk of bringing others into peril, having, by God’s grace, escaped

ourselves from the most imminent peril, at the very moment when all hope, as to this life, had been utterly taken from us? Let us quit these mysterious precincts—let us quit them speedily—but let us not rashly be seen in the busy city. There is a place known to me, (and Athanasia also has, with far different purposes, visited it heretofore,) where safety, I think, may be expected, and where, if danger do come, it can find no unnecessary victim. Let us hasten this night to the catacombs,* which are beyond the Esquiline. There, but a few nights ago, we committed to the dust the mortal relics of Thraso. I thought this evening to have approached the companionship of his better part. Beside the tomb of the blessed martyr, we will offer up thanks for our deliverance, and await in patience the hour that is to make us altogether free—or to undo what has been done.”

* Arenariæ.

“ Yes, dear father, let us go together,” said the maiden ; “ there is no one will seek us—there, best of all, shall our thanksgivings and our prayers be offered. We will sit by the sepulchre of the holy man ; and Valerius will go into the city, and procure what things are needful.”

She leaned upon me as she said so, and we began the descent of another flight of steps, beyond the dark chamber ; this terminated at length in a door, the bolts of which being withdrawn, we found ourselves beneath the open sky of night, at the extremity of one of the wooded walks that skirt the southern base of the Palatine—the remains of the more than Assyrian splendour of groves and gardens, which had once connected the golden house of Nero with the more modest structures of his predecessors. I wrapped Athanasia in my cloak, and walked beside her in my tunic ; and the old priest conducted us by many windings, avoiding, as far as was possible,

all the glare of the Suburra—round about the edge of the city, towards the place of which he had spoken.

To my astonishment, it was not in any wild and desert place, but in the midst of the gardens which hang over the city-wall, by the great Esquiline Gate, that Aurelius at last desired us to slacken our pace, for that we had reached very nearly the end of our journey.

“Is it here,” said I, “is it here, in the centre of all this splendour, that you hope to find a place of more safety than any private dwelling could afford you? The dead, indeed, are safe every where; but surely you have not chosen wisely such a retreat as this for the living.”

“Have patience,” replied the old man; “you are but a stranger in Rome—and yet, after all, you speak what I should have heard without surprise, from many that have spent all their days in it. For few ever think of entering a region which is almost as extensive as Rome itself, and none,

I think, are acquainted with all the labyrinthine windings of that strange region."

So saying, the priest led the way into the centre of one of the thickest of the groves. The trees were tall and strong, and their branches formed a canopy overhead, through which scarcely here and there the twinkling beams of a single star could penetrate. The undergrowth, however, was, if possible, still more luxuriant; insomuch, that not without great difficulty could we force for ourselves any passage among the close creeping shrubs, and wide spread bushes of alder. Perseverance, nevertheless, at length accomplished what seemed to me at first almost impracticable. We reached the centre of the wide thicket, and there, within the circuit of the woody screen, we found a small space of soil, comparatively bare. The light of moon and star plunged down there among the surrounding blackness of boughs and thick leaves, as into some deep well, and shewed the entrance of a natural grotto, which had,

indeed, all the appearance of neglect, oblivion, and utter desertedness.

“ Confess, Valerius,” said the old man, “ that I did not deceive you, when I promised a safe and a lonely shelter. But there is no hurry now ; sit you down here by the mouth of the cavern, and let me taste once more the water of this hidden fountain, for my lips are parched and dry, and no one will disturb us.”

I had not observed, until the old man said this, a small fountain hard by the mouth of the grotto, which, in former days, had evidently been much cared for, although now almost all its surface was covered with water-lilies, and other tender flowers, that spread their leaves abroad over it. The marble, also, with which the sides of the fountain were coated, now shewed dim and green, by reason of the undisturbed moisture, and the creeping moss ; nor had a statue, that reposed just within the entrance of the grot, escaped the general desolation,

for the damp grass had grown up so as half to cover the recumbent limbs, and the beautiful Parian stone had lost all its brightness.

“ You can scarcely see where the inscription was,” said Aurelius, “ for the letters are filled up or effaced ; but I remember when many admired it, and I think I can still repeat the lines—yes, it was thus they ran :—

‘ Nymph of the grot, these sacred springs I keep,
And to the murmur of these waters sleep ;
Ah ! spare my slumbers, gently tread the cave,
And drink in silence, or in silence lave.’*

Little did they, who graved this command,
conjecture how well it was to be obeyed.

* So Pope has rendered the beautiful lines of the celebrated inscription :

Hujus Nympha Loci, sacri custodia fontis,
Dormio, dum blandæ sentio murmur aquæ ;
Parce meum, quisquis tangis cava marmora, somnum
Rumpere ; sive bibas, sive lavere, tace.

But there should be another inscription here, and one of a very different tenor. Ay, here it is," said he, stepping on a long flat piece of marble, almost buried among the weeds—" here is it also ; but it would be a more difficult matter for me to remember all the words that I have seen legible upon this fatal monument."

I was advancing to examine the stone, but the old man stopped me, and said, " No, no ; what avails it to spell out the record of an old forgotten murder ? Do you remember the story of Asinius ? it is told somewhere by Cicero. It was within this very cavern that the man was butchered ; and now you see both he and his monument are alike sinking into forgetfulness. I believe, however, the monument itself must bear the blame of part of this ; for I have heard my father say, that he had often been told this was one of the most favourite fountains about all this quarter, until that slaughter took place, and then people be-

came more shy of coming hither. It is all owing to that stone, that the precept of the Sleeping Nymph has been so well complied with.* But for that the underwood round about us would never have been permitted to thrive so wildly.”

Athanasia, in the mean time, had sate down by the margin of the grotto, and was laving her forehead with the water of the solitary fountain. Old Aurelius, too, dipped his hands in the well, and tasted of the water, and then turning to me he said, with a grave smile, “Valerius, methinks you are religious in your regard for the slumbers of the nymph.” He whispered something into the ear of Athanasia, and received an answer from her in the same tone, ere he proceeded. “Draw near—fear not that I shall do any thing rashly—we owe

* *Asinius autem brevi illo tempore quasi in hortulos iret, in arenarias quasdam juxta portam Exquiliniam perductus, occiditur.—Pro Cluent.*

all things to your love—we know we do ; but speak plainly,—Do you indeed desire to be admitted into the fellowship of the true Faith ? Let not the symbol of regeneration be applied hastily. Without doubt, great were my joy might my hands be honoured so as to shed the blessed water of baptism upon the brow of my dear Valerius.”

“ Ah, Valerius !” said Athanasia, “ I know God has touched your heart ; why should this be delayed any longer ? You have shared the perils of the faithful. Partake with them in good, as well as in evil. Hesitate no longer ; God will perfect what hath been so nobly begun.”

“ My father,” said I, “ and my dear Athanasia, dearer to me than all things, I hesitate only because I doubt if I am yet worthy. Surely I believe that this is the right faith, and that there is no God but the Jehovah whom you worship.”

“ Beautiful is humility in the sight of Heaven,” said the old man ; and with that

he rose up from the place where he had been sitting, and began, standing by the margin of the well, to pour out words of thanksgiving and supplication, such as I have never heard equalled from any human lips but his. The deep calm voice of the holy man sounded both sweet and awful in the breathless air of midnight. The tall black trees stood all around, like a wall, cutting us off from the world, and from the thoughts of the world; and the moon, steady over-head in the serene blue sky, seemed to shower down light and beauty upon nothing in all the wide world, but that little guarded space of our seclusion. I stepped into the cool water of the fountain. The old man stooped over me, and sprinkled the drops upon my forehead, and the appointed words were repeated. Aurelius kissed my brow, as I came forth from the water, and Athanasia also drew slowly near, and then hastily she pressed my forehead with her trembling lips.

We all sate down together by the lonely well ; and we sate in silence, for I could not be without many thoughts, partaken by none but myself, at the moment when I had thus, in the face of God and man, abjured the faith of all my fathers, and passed into the communion of the feeble, and despised, and persecuted Few ; nor did either the priest or Athanasia essay to disturb my meditations. There were moments (for I must not conceal from you my weakness) in which I could scarcely help suspecting that I had done something that was wrong. I thought of my far distant mother ; and I could not reflect without pain upon the feelings with which I had every reason to suppose she, kind as she was, and merciful in all things, would have contemplated the scene which had passed. I thought of my dead parent too ; but that was with thoughts yet more serious and awful. The conviction of my own mind, in obedience to which I had acted, relieved me, however,

from any feelings of self-reproach—My father is dead, said I to myself—He died in ignorance, and he has not been judged according to the light, which never shone upon him. But now—oh yes, it must be so—the darkness has passed from before his eyes; and, if the spirits of the departed ever visit in the dim hours of silence those who were dear to them upon the earth, surely his venerable shade stood by smiling while the forehead of his son was laved with these blessed waters. Nor were these all that I thought of. Meantime, minutes—hours glided away, while troubled, and solemn, and tender thoughts, thus occupied by turns my bosom. The old priest sate by me, his arms folded on his breast, gazing upwards upon the spangled glories of the firmament. Athanasia was on the other side, close by the statue of the Sleeping Naiad. From time to time, she leaned her cheek upon my shoulder; then she, too, would fix her eyes for a moment upon the untroubled beauty of the

moon ; and then the maiden would turn away from me, stooping over the brink of the fountain, and once and again I saw its calm dark waters rippled beneath her by the dropping of a tear.

“ My dear children,” said the good old Aurelius, after this silence had lasted for I know not how long, “ methinks more sadness is amongst us than might suit the remembrance of what Providence has done for us, since the sun that went down upon much sorrow is about to rise upon so many fair hopes. I am old, but you are young ; the world lies behind me, save a remnant I know not how brief. It lies all before you, and you have a light whereby to look upon it, which my early day wanted. I trust that soon, very soon, ye shall both be far from this city—I say both, for I know well, go where ye may, ye will both go together. As for me, my lot is cast here, and here I will remain. Valerius, you must leave us betimes—you must return into the city, and con-

sult with your friends and hers, how best Athanasia may be conveyed safely beyond the bounds of Italy. Cæsar, indeed, rules everywhere ; but at a distance from Rome suspicion is, at least, less watchful ; and there is no precept given by which ye are bound to seek unnecessary perils.”

“ Aurelius,” said I—“ my dear father Aurelius, think not but that I have already been considering all these things anxiously. As soon as I have seen you safely placed within the retreat of which you have spoken to me, I shall hasten to Licinius, my kinsman, who already, indeed, must be feeling no small anxiety from my absence. I shall speak with him, and with both the Sempronii. My own errand to the capital I value as nothing, and I shall be ready on the instant, if Athanasia herself will consent to partake my voyage.”

“ She will,” answered the good priest.—“ In her hour of most imminent peril, she confessed that she loved you. Athanasia

will be your wife, and ye will both serve the Lord many days, amidst the quiet valleys of your far off island.—Nay, Athanasia, my dear child, do not weep, for these are not common days, and you must follow, without fear, the path which God's providence points out for your safety. Before ye go, my children, I myself shall join your hands in the name of our God."

Athanasia heard his words, and saw me gaze upon his face, but she made no reply, except by the tears which Aurelius rebuked, and a timid, yet grave and serious pressure, with which she, when he had made an end of speaking, returned the fervid pressure of my hand upon hers.

"Children," said the old man, "there is no need of words when hearts are open—the tears that ye have shed together, are the best earnest of the vows that ye shall ere long, I trust, pronounce. Yet, let no rashness attend your steps. The dawn must now be near, and Athanasia and I had bet-

ter retire into our protecting covert. Valerius will leave us, and return at eventide. Till then, fasting and praying, we shall give thanks for our deliverance, and ask the aid that alone is precious for the time that yet remains.”

I had fortunately brought all the way with me the lamp which lighted our steps down the mysterious staircase, from the shrine of Apollo. Some little oil still remained within it, and Aurelius soon struck a light, and, taking it in his hand, began to enter before us the dark cavern, by the mouth of which we had all this while been sitting. You, perhaps, have never heard of those strange excavations, the whole extent of which has probably never been known to any one person, but which appear, indeed, even as the priest had asserted, to be almost co-extensive with the great city beneath whose foundations they are placed. For what purpose they were at first dug, is a subject which has long exercised the con-

jectures of those fond of penetrating into the origin of things, and the customs of antiquity. By some it is supposed, that, in such caverns, winding far away into unseen recesses, the first rude inhabitants of Italy, like the Troglodytes of Upper Egypt and Ethiopia, had fixed their miserable abodes. Others assert that they owe their origin merely to the elder builders of the visible Rome, who, to avoid marring the surface of the earth, were contented to bring their materials of sand, clay, and stone, from these subterraneous labyrinths, which so grew with the progress of diligence, and with the extension of the city itself. Perhaps both conjectures may have some foundation in truth; but be that as it may, there is no question, that, in later times, these great catacombs have been widened and extended, to serve as places of burial for the mortal remains of the poor citizens; and this more particularly, since the period when the Esquiline Hill was given by Augustus to his favourite Mecænas, and so purified

from the pollutions to which allusion is frequent in the writings of Horace, and all the poets of the Republic. And now is it to be wondered at, that here, in regions so obscure and dismal, the persecuted adherents of the New Faith should have frequently sought not only resting-places for the bodies of their dead, but even shelter for themselves, amidst the darkness and cruelty of those relentless days? Hither, more than once, the old priest said, he had fled to escape the pursuit of his enemies—here once more he hoped the shield of safety would lie over his peril—here, at last, by whatever death he should die, his surviving brethren had promised to lay his bones in the earth, beside Thraso of Antioch, and many more that, in the bloody times of Nero and Domitian, had already, in the sight of all that heartless city, merited the crown, and the spotless robe, and the palm-branch of martyrdom, by patient endurance of the last insolence of man.

The old priest, therefore, held the lamp before us, and we entered those gloomy regions, wherein alone the servants of the Son of God could, at that troubled æra, esteem themselves in safety from the hot pursuit of contemptuous power. We passed along beneath the dark arches of the rock-hewn roof, and between the long winding walls, on either side of which appeared many humble inscriptions, recording the virtues of the departed and the regrets of the surviving poor;—of these last, however, as it appeared, all must long since have been gathered to the ashes of those whom they had lamented, for there was no semblance of any new monument among all that we observed, and most of them, to judge from the shape of the letters upon them, must have been set up at least as long ago as the period of the death of Asinius. After traversing many of these long subterraneous galleries, we came, at last, to one narrower and more low-roofed than the rest, into which Aurelius struck aside, saying, “ Here Thraso lies, but

no inscription marks the place where a Christian finds repose—Here is the spot ; with my own hands I lent feeble help in digging the grave—Athanasia, too, knows it well, for she also did not fear to assist in rendering the last honours to that soldier of Christ.”

A flat thin stone, without mark or epitaph, indicated the spot.

“ Let us sit here,” said Athanasia—“ let us sit here patiently till Valerius returns ; but how, when he is once gone from us, shall he ever be able to find us again among all the windings of this dark region ?”

“ He never could,” said the priest, “ neither he nor any one, I think ; and therein is our safety. But that matters not ; and yet, had I thought of it sooner, we might have spared him the trouble of entering our retreat along with us. The day, however, has not yet begun to dawn, and no time is lost ; for at this hour he might excite suspicion by being seen walking in the streets. We shall conduct him back again to the

gate of the cavern, and then wait here till the darkness of evening make it safe for him to seek us out again. But, first of all, he must assist me in lifting up this stone."

I was a little surprised with this last proposition ; but seeing that the old man was in earnest, I, nevertheless, complied with his request. The stone yielded to our efforts, and I saw, when it was removed, a sword, a spear, and a brazen buckler, lying together upon the surface of the recently stirred earth. I took the sword in my hand, and offered it to Aurelius ; but he bid me lay that down, for of such weapons he had no need. He then stooped himself, and lifted a small lamp of iron, which, with a cruise of oil, lay beside the weapons of the buried soldier. The lamp, which we had brought with us, could not have lasted much longer, so I was extremely relieved when I observed this new supply.

When I replaced the stone, however, I took care not to hide, for the present, the sword and the spear of Thraso. I laid them

both at the feet of Athanasia ; and then leaving her by the funeral-stone, Aurelius and I retraced our steps to the mouth of the catacomb.

“ Already,” said he, as we came forth to the open air—“ already the sky is red eastward—walk cautiously through the gardens, and regain with all speed the house of your kinsman. I need not preach diligence to you ; for you well know, that, without your diligence, what has been done has all been done in vain. Go, my son ; may all blessings attend your steps. Come back at the rising of the moon, and cast a stone into the fountain, and I shall be within hearing. Go, and fear not.”

CHAPTER IX.

I PASSED without disturbance through the wide gardens of the Esquiline, and the streets of the city, in which no one was as yet moving, except a few rustics here and there, driving mules and asses laden with herbs to the market-place. When I reached the house of my kinsman, however, it was evident that sleep did not prevail within its gates ; for lights were visible in the vestibule, the gates of which, as could be by no means usual at such an hour, stood half open to the way. I entered, and found Dromo, and several more of the domestic slaves, sitting in conversation with the porter ; while, apart from them, appeared Boto

walking up and down, and visibly occupied with something quite different from what formed the subject of their discourses.

He could not conceal the extravagance of his satisfaction on seeing me enter among them in safety ; so that I had no doubt his brother had informed him, in so far at least, of the strange scenes that had passed after our leaving him in the Mammertine at the beginning of the evening. Nor was Dromo, the Cretan, much behind him in many marks of satisfaction. The two affectionate slaves received me, in short, with the warmest demonstrations of joy, and conducted me together to the chamber of Licinius, in which I found a company assembled, the whole of whom, it was sufficiently manifest, had been waiting all the night in expectation of seeing or hearing from me. The orator himself was there—and young Sextus, pale with watching—and Sabinus, still habited in his full military attire, with a goblet of wine before him on the table—and, last of

all, Lucius Sempronius, who was reclining in the corner of the room, at some little distance from the rest. It was he that eagerly and aloud began to question me the moment I came in; and I knew from the style in which he spoke, that all my friends, who were present, had already been made aware of the singular manner in which Athanasia and the old priest had been withdrawn from the council-chamber of the Palatine. A few words informed them of what had followed after we quitted the Temple of Apollo, and of the obscure retreat in which I had just parted from the fugitives.

“ I thank the Gods,” said Sempronius,—“ so far at least it goes well—but if this strictness, of which the Centurion speaks, shall be adhered to, there still must be no small difficulty about conveying the girl beyond the city.”

“ In truth,” quoth Sabinus, after a little pause, “ I am afraid this is scarcely a mat-

ter in regard to which I should be consulted. I know not but already I have done several things that could not be quite reconciled with my duty. I shall, in all probability, be set on the watch myself, and if so—much as I must regret the necessity—it certainly will be most necessary for me to discharge what is committed to my trust. Is there no possibility, think you, of inventing some impenetrable disguise? Depend on it, it is quite impossible the young lady should remain any where in Rome, without being ere long discovered. The first thing is to have her safe beyond the city-walls.”

“ I myself,” said I, “ shall embark instantly for Britain. Sempronius, Athanasia must go with me—Surely it may be possible to have her carried unobserved to the shore.”

“ You !” quoth Licinius—“ you embark instantly for Britain ?—You know not what you say, my dear boy ; your law-suit

has been determined this very afternoon, and you must not think of leaving Rome at the moment of such magnificent success. The great Valerian villa—and every thing that Cneius left is your own.”

“By Jove!” cried Sabinus, “did ever any mortal receive such a piece of news with such a face as this!—But come, here is health to the lord of the great Valerian villa, and may this Massic choke me, if I don’t love him the better for all his gravity.”

“Would to heaven!” said Sempronius, “our young friend had loved as truly as he does under happier auspices! I am the last man in Rome that would wish to see him sacrificing the prospects that have but just opened themselves upon him. No, no, Valerius must stay and take possession of the palace of his ancestors, destined, as I hope he is, to equal, under the favour of the Gods, the noblest name among all their line. My dear niece—let us trust she may be concealed somewhere in safety, from the

pursuit. Separated from this Aurelius, and the rest of this fanatic crew, she will, ere long, without question, abandon the dreams they have filled her mind withal; and then, on some future, happier day, our dear friend may perhaps have no reason either to fear or to blush, for lifting her over the threshold of the Valerii. Their loves have been already well proved in trouble, let us hope that the merciful Gods may yet reward them in prosperity.”

I drew near to the old man when he had said this, and, receiving his embrace, whispered into his ear, “Sempronius, you speak generously; but know that this very evening I also have become a Christian.”

“Heavens!” cried he, “what limits shall ever be affixed to this contagion!—every day the madness seizes upon some noble victim. Rash, rash boy! have you not seen already to what consequences this must lead?”

“What is it? what is it?” says Licinius—“what new calamity is this? Have my

ears deceived me, or did I hear aright what afflicts me more than any thing of all that has yet happened? Speak, dear Caius, speak, and, for the sake of all the Roman blood that is in your veins, undo this suspicion—Swear, that I heard not your whisper well—swear to me, that you have not embraced this phrenzy.”

“ My friends,” said I, “ why should I speak to one, when all of you are, I well know, alike interested in every thing that concerns me? Neither rashly nor hastily, nor in phrenzy nor in any madness, but calmly and deliberately, after many struggles and much reflection, I have, at length, been satisfied, that this Faith, of which you think so contemptuously, is the only true Faith, and that in it alone, now that it has been proclaimed to the world, the immortal hopes of mankind are reposed. Seek not to argue with me, for, ignorant as ye are as to this matter, it is impossible that you should speak wisely or well concerning it. In all things else I bow to the opinion of

age and understanding so much above my own ; but here I have thought for myself, and my faith is fixed.”

Licinius looked upon me, while I spake so, with a countenance full of painful and anxious emotion. In the eye of young Sextus I saw a tear ready to start, and his whole aspect was that of one sad and bewildered. Sempronius leaned his brow upon his hand, and turned himself away from me. But as for the Centurion, he preserved his usual air, without much alteration either in one way or another ; and after a moment, all the rest continuing silent, he whispered to me across the table, “ By Jove, Valerius, I have been in love myself ere now, and perhaps am not out of the scrape just at present ; but, I must confess to you, you have thrown quite a new light upon the matter. Why, man, do but consider with yourself for a moment ; how do you suppose the whole world has been going on for heaven knows how many thousand years ? What do you fancy to be the great merits of the

present age, that it should be treated with more favour than all that have gone before it? And, if you come to speak of the Jews, by Castor, I never was in their country, but every body knows they are the most pitiful, black-hearted, absurd, mean, knavish set of creatures that ever the world was disgraced with. They were always by the ears among themselves; but I think it is rather too much that they should have the credit of bringing their betters (by which I mean all the world besides) into confusion. You may think as you please, but, depend upon it, I understand much more of their character than you do; and, rely upon me, my dear fellow, there is neither honour nor wisdom of any kind to be got by consorting with them. In fact, granting all the present disturbance were over, and these people allowed to follow their own devices without any one's interfering with them, I have my doubts whether your best friends could continue to keep company with you if you persisted in being one of them. I am sure no-

body will be more sorry than I ; but really, to speak honestly, I think I am sure you will quite ruin your character if you don't instantly dismiss all this nonsense from your mind. And as for the young lady—I have seen many of them extremely superstitious, (though not, to be sure, after this Christian fashion,) and I never yet knew one of them that did not become wonderfully less so, after she was fairly settled in life, and got a husband to be kind to her, look ye, children to be whipped, and a household to be scolded. Come, come, remember you are but green in the ways of the world yet ; and all this will blow over anon, and you will laugh more heartily than any one else when you think of your weakness : But any folly is excuseable after all in a young lover ; that is to say, man, provided it don't last too long. Come, come, a Christian, quotha ! —By Jove ! I would almost as soon have suspected myself of this as you.—But look up, my good friend, I don't think you are listening to me."

“ My dear Sabinus,” said I, “ I do listen, but I think it is rather to the gay Prætorian, than to the patient friend, I expected to have found in you.”

“ Poh ! poh ! ” said he again, “ you take every thing so seriously. If you are resolved to be a Christian, I am very sorry for it ; but neither that, nor any thing of the sort, shall ever stand between me and a true friend. I hope you will soon see the thing as I do—I know you will ; but, in the mean time, Valerius, you may count upon me—I assure you you may.”—And in so saying, the kind man squeezed my hand with all his customary fervour.

He then turned round to the rest of our friends, who were still as silent as ever, and began, with the warmest zeal, to propose for their consideration a dozen different schemes of escape, that had already suggested themselves to his imagination.

“ One thing, however,” said he, “ is, in the first place, absolutely indispensable ;

and that is, that we should have a bark in readiness at Ostium, or somewhere else; but there I think it would be least likely to attract any particular observation. We must have the ship quite ready—manned, and victualled, and all; and she could set sail perhaps by night, and be off the coast before any one thinks of inquiring after her. And if you once get to Corsica, or Sicily, or any place beyond Italy, your way to Britain will lie quite smooth before you, and no one will think of offering the smallest interruption. But what do you think the young lady would be most likely to fancy during the voyage—I mean in the way of eating? We must take particular care as to that—you must, on no account, allow yourselves to be run so short as we were the last time. By Jove! the taste of that old biscuit is scarcely out of my mouth yet.”

Even Sempronius could not help smiling, when he perceived into what channel the thoughts of the provident Centurion had

turned themselves—and Licinius also smiled; but he soon recalled our attention to matters of more serious moment. He expressed himself, first of all, in terms of the deepest regret concerning the state into which my mind had been brought; but he had too much delicacy to hint—what, nevertheless, I have no doubt, he would have done, had I been absent—that he considered my love for Athanasia as having been the chief instrument of what he called my most unfortunate perversion. He passed then, at great length, into an account of the speech he had delivered on the preceding afternoon before the Court of the Centemviri—of the arguments by which he had satisfied the judges as to the justice of my claims—of the applauses with which he had been listened to—and of the unhesitating manner, so gratifying to his feelings, in which the favourable judgment of the court had been pronounced. For some moments, in his earnest detail of all these judicial proceed-

ings, he seemed almost to have lost sight of the present situation and views of the person most interested in their termination. But then, when in the progress of his story, he came to describe and enlarge upon the magnificence of my new possessions—the wide domains in Africa—the rich farms in Sicily—the thousands of slaves that were engaged in their cultivation—the Spanish silver mine—and, last of all, the splendours of the great villa upon the banks of the Tiber—its gardens—its baths—its porticos—its rich furniture—its paintings—its statues—its libraries, and I know not how many particulars besides—it was not difficult to perceive that he could scarcely think, without absolute indignation, of the person who, having but just become the master of all these things, could consent to abandon them for the sake of a pretty girl, and a fantastic delusion. Had Sempronius not been there among his friends, I suspect he might have expressed himself rather more bitterly ; but

as it stood, it was quite impossible not to be aware of the thoughts that were uppermost in his mind. He concluded with saying, in a tone that bordered very nearly upon derision, “ And such are the realities which our young friend quits for the reasons he has mentioned ! Well, every man must judge for himself. If it must be so, let it be so.”

I heard him patiently to the end, and then said, “ You have well summed up the whole matter, my dear Licinius. It must indeed be so ; therefore let it be so : and if you love me, as how should I doubt you do, let it be without any farther discussion of this kind, which I have already told you can be productive of no good effect ;—that is to say, of no effect which you, in your present state of opinion, could consider as good. I go immediately to Britain, and I trust she—for whom I would leave all these things, were they millions of times greater than they are—shall, by the aid of your kindness, go with me in safety. There is one re-

quest only which I have, in addition to all this, to lay before you ; and that you may hear it the more patiently, it does not concern myself.

“ In a word then,” I continued, “ should happier days arrive, I hope once more to be among you here in Rome. The wealth which, thanks to your zeal, Licinius, is this day mine, can be of little use to me in the British valley, to which, for the present, I retire. Above all, this beautiful villa of which you speak,—why, because for a time I am unable to occupy it, should the mansion of my fathers stand empty, when there are others among their descendants, who lie not under the same necessity of exile? Till I am enabled to breathe in freedom the air of Rome, I trust Licinius will consent to let Sextus represent me in my villa. There, too, I hope Sempronius will permit his daughter to be. It will give pleasure to Athanasia and myself, to think, when we are far away in our solitary valley, that

those magnificent halls contain the dearest of our friends. When we come back, if ever we do so, they will not grudge to make room for us beneath the same roof with themselves. Lucius—Sempronius, what say you?”

They were both silent for a moment; but Sabinus was at hand to answer for them.

“By all Olympus! I shall knock down any man henceforth, that in my presence abuses Christianity as a destruction of men’s hearts. Let it be, my good friends, as our dear Caius says. Let it be so. I know, Sextus, I have at least your voice upon my side. Let it be so; and for heaven’s sake, let it be immediately. In my humble opinion, they ought to be married this very evening. It will go very hard, if we can’t contrive it so, that Valerius and Athanasia may have a peep of the procession ere they embark.—But I have been forgetting what I think is almost of equal importance. Our friends won’t think of setting off with-

out some ceremony of the same sort for themselves ; will they ?”

Our conversation was interrupted by Dromo, who told me that Silo the jailor had come to see me, and was below in the hall. There I found the humane man, with his little daughter in his hand, and walked aside with him into the inner-portico of the house. I told him how the escape, for which his zeal alone was to be thanked, had been terminated, and where Athanasia and Aurelius were waiting an opportunity of being conveyed beyond the city ; and then inquired whether no suspicion had been attached to himself, in consequence of his absence from the Capitoline. He assured me that he had no reason to think any such suspicion had been excited ; but added, that, after having been engaged in such an affair, he could by no means consider it proper for himself to continue any longer in the situation which he held.

“ The oath which I had taken to Trajan,” said he, “ prevented me from adopting the

easier and simpler course of setting open for our dear friends the gates of the Mammer-tine; and I trust that I did not offend against that oath by acting as I did, after they had been taken away for the time from my keeping. But both they and you must be alike aware of the pain which I suffered during their confinement, and of the dangers which I have encountered by giving my aid to their escape. I am resolved no more to be subject to such struggles. I cannot preserve my faith as a Christian, and my honour as a servant of Trajan, liable, as you too well see I am, to be made an instrument in the hand of oppression, for the persecution of those whose only crime is adherence to the same faith into which I myself have been baptized. This very day I resign my charge in the Mammertine; this very night, if it so please you, I am ready to accompany you and my dear young lady, in your flight to Britain. There I shall, at least, be able to console the old age of my parents,—there I shall sit by the same fire-side with my bro-

ther—there I shall bring up my child in peace, and teach her young lips to repeat the name of her Saviour. Do not refuse my request, Valerius. I thirst for the repose of my native valley. I am weary of prisons and palaces, and blood and danger. I pray you, let me go with you—and lay my bones, when I die, beside the quiet waters of Anton, in which I bathed when I was a stripling.”

I need not say with what gladness I heard this proposal from Silo. Indeed, the thought immediately occurred to me, that, so far from being any impedient, he might be of the most essential use to us in forwarding our scheme of evasion. I left him, therefore, for a moment, and returning to my friends, informed them of what I had just heard, and of the hopes which I was inclined to entertain. The whole of them, perceiving now at last from the way in which I had spoken, that there was no chance of diverting me from my project, entered, like true friends, into serious consultation respecting the best method of carrying my project

into execution. The aid of Silo, who had already given such proofs both of his presence of mind, and of his prudence, and of his courage, was regarded by them as affording promise of the highest importance. He was shortly summoned to take part in our consultation, and after much being said and considered, it was at last resolved that he, the jailor, after resigning in a formal manner the office he held, and transferring his property for the present into the custody of Licinius, should forthwith repair to Ostium, and there hire and put in readiness, for immediate use, a small vessel, the lightest he could find, in which the whole of the fugitive party might transport themselves at least as far as Corsica. To this proposal the zealous Silo without hesitation assented. It was agreed that he should have the mariners on their benches by the coming on of night, and that he himself should be waiting for us by a certain ruined tower, which stands conspicuously on a projecting rock by the river side, about a

mile and a half above Ostium. There he should be hailed by me, and from thence he should himself conduct us to the bark, which, the moment we reached it, should be put in motion to pass out from the harbour. We left it to Silo himself, to stock the bark with any merchandize which he might deem best adapted to deceive both the mariners themselves, and the superintendants of the haven.

All these things being so arranged, nothing more remained for me but to provide suitable disguises for Athanasia and the priest, and some plausible pretext, by means of which the vigilance of the nightly guardians of the city-gates might be overcome. I had still some difficulty to encounter before I could prevail on Sempronius and Licinius to give their consent for celebrating so hastily the nuptials of Sextus. But this also was in the end accomplished; and it was determined that the bride should be carried home, not to Licinius' house in the city, but to my villa on the Tiber—where, after

having passed the barriers, Athanasia and I might hope to pause for some brief space, in our descent of the river—and so bid adieu, under circumstances of happier omen, to all the friends for whose sake either of us could be likely to regret our departure from Rome.

CHAPTER X.

I HAD been then but a few days in the capital of the world, and every hope of my bosom depended upon my succeeding in an attempt to quit its walls this evening ; yet you do not imagine that my hours were spent in contemplation of the city, the magnificence of which, nevertheless, might be said to be still new and unfamiliar to my provincial eyes. The truth is, that to say nothing of the interests which alone had power to occupy my secret mind, I had many engagements, in which, as I was at that moment situated, it was absolutely necessary I should consume a very considerable part of the day. Perhaps it might be well for me that it was so, for to return to the Esqui-

line before the fall of night was entirely out of the question ; and had no external occupations been forced upon me, I should have done nothing, without doubt, but walk up and down the long porticos of my kinsman's mansion, tormenting myself with unprofitable dreams, and perhaps disturbing for Sextus the happiness of a day, which it was the second wish of my heart he should never cease to regard as among the happiest of his life. I say, therefore, it was perhaps well, in every point of view, that, partly from the necessity of making provision of various kinds for my expected voyage, but still more in consequence of the law-suit, with the termination of which you have just been made acquainted, I had no leisure that day, from which to work out unnecessary pain either for myself or for others.

First of all, I had to assist Licinius in looking over an infinity of deeds connected with the large possessions my right to which had now been ascertained ; and to superin

tend the drawing out of others, by which I constituted him, for the present, my representative over all my Italian estates, and conveyed to his son the right of commanding as might please him every thing about my great villa in the neighbourhood of the city, and the numerous slaves, both rural and domestic, attached to its precincts. In the next place, I had to go to the Forum for the purpose of manumitting some slaves, (such a largess being naturally expected on my accession ;) and while I was occupied with this, need I tell you, that my own poor Briton was not forgotten? Licinius having, at the joint request of Sextus and myself, accorded that morning to the Cretan also the well-merited gift of his liberty, Boto and Dromo were seen strutting about the Forum together for some moments, each of them arrayed in that worshipful cap, which had for so many years formed, without all doubt, the most prominent object in all their day-dreams of felicity. I shall not trouble you with needless parti-

culars. Let it suffice, that the greater part of the day was thus spent by me in unavoidable business; that towards supper-time, I found the household of Licinius in mighty confusion, in consequence of the preparations for the approaching nuptials of young Sextus; and that, chiefly to avoid occasioning any additional trouble at my kinsman's home, I once more accepted the invitation of the Centurion, and became his guest at the Prætorian Camp; but not in the *Julius*, the noisy revels of which would have in no wise accorded with the spirits of one already fatigued as I was with much bodily watching, and still more grievously worn out by the pressure of mental anxieties.

I supped with the kind Prætorian, therefore, in his own private chamber, where, excepting only that he could not entirely refrain from touching now and then upon what he called my Jewish dream, his conversation was the kindest of all balsams that

could have been applied to my feverish bosom. What he dwelt upon most fervently, however, was the probability—the certainty he seemed to esteem it—that a persecution of this nature could not be long persisted in by such a prince as Trajan ; and the pleasure with which, that being all at an end, he should see me come back to Rome, and take due possession of the inheritance of my fathers. After expatiating most fluently for some minutes on the expected delights of that day, he paused suddenly, and then added, in a tone of some little hesitation, “ And as for me, I wonder in what state you shall find me. Rich or poor—married or single—Centurion or Tribune—one thing is certain, that I shall, in all circumstances, be not a little rejoiced to see you.”

“ You had better marry, my good captain,” said I.

“ Marry ! me to marry ! I have not the least thought of such a thing. You did

not put any faith, did you, in the raillery of those waggish fellows of yesterday?"

"A little—a very little, Sabinus."

"Poh! poh! now you are jesting."

"And much, very much, Sabinus, in the conscious looks of a certain blushing Centurion, yesterday."

"Come, come," quoth he, "there is more cunning in these British eyes of yours, after all, than I ever should have dreamt of. Fill your cup to the brim, boy, and since you are to leave us so speedily, I shall e'en have no secrets for you."

I did as I was bid, and nodded in signal that I was in readiness to listen.

"You smile," said he—"by Jove, the boy laughs! What would you have me do? Look you, Valerius, I don't pretend to think I am much fallen from my prime yet. I have seen service;—true, but what of that? I have kept a light heart in all my campaigns, my boy, and I think I can still dance an old step, sing an old ditty, and drink a cup of old Falernian, when it suits my fan-

cy, with the best of them. But my day, it must be confessed, begins to wear a little, a very little, towards the evening ; and, Castor ! if you allow supper-time to slip over, I don't know but you must go to bed with a light stomach. Now or never was the word, my boy ; and the widow is mine own. I shall wed her in less than a month ; for I was resolved poor old Leberinus, (my dear friend !)—I was determined he should have fair play at my hands—I was resolved nothing should ineroach upon his twelve-month's"—

“ And Xerophrastes ?” said I——

“ And as for the most sagacious and venerable Xerophrastes, why, to tell you the truth, I see nothing for him but that he should allow his beard to curl as it pleases, drop his long cloak over his ambitious pair of shanks, forswear moonlight, purchase for himself a dark lantern instead, and see whether he can't find, within the four walls of Rome, an honest Greek, and a constant widow, to make one blessed wedding withal.

—That is my advice to the Stoic—Stoic no longer—but, if there be hoops upon a tub, the most cynical of all Cynics. Methinks I already hear him snarling. Diogenes was but the Philip that went before this Alexander.”

“Poor Xerophrastes !” said I ; “ I confess I, for my share, can scarcely help pitying him. The conceit of the moonlight scene was certainly quite too much ; but, to speak honestly, did it not appear to you, at one time, as if the widow were very much disposed to listen ?”

“ My dear boy,” quoth the Centurion, “ did you ever chance, having no profounder occupation, to spend a forenoon, saving your dignity, in looking over the parapet of a bridge ?”

“ Perhaps I may, Sabinus ; but, if I did, I am sure I never saw either Xerophrastes or the pretty widow in the water, believe me.”

“ Well, I like that, I confess,” quoth he

again ; “ but tell me this, Valerius, did you ever see a pretty bunch of yellow straw, or a beautiful peacock’s feather, or any other light gew-gaw of terrestrial nature, wafted gently from beneath the arch, and about to plunge away into the more rapid course of the river? You nod ; well, did you ever chance, being a bit of a philosopher after your fashion, as we all see you are, to take notice of a certain little balancing, hesitating, charming indecision, which such a gew-gaw takes a pleasure in exhibiting at such a moment? How the sweet toy will slumber for a minute on the smooth glassy surface of the water, immediately under the shadow of the bridge, as if not able at once to make up its mind into which of the three or four diverging streams, that all part just from about that point, it may be most becoming, or most prudent, or most agreeable to commit itself? I have seen a blue and red feather keep half a dozen streams rippling away, like so many rivals, for as much time

as would suffice to roast an oyster in the shell;—and pray now, when the coquetry was at last over, and the pretty bauble had plunged into its fate, to which of the competing currents do you think it paid the best compliment?”

“You flow so fast, my dear Sabinus,” said I, “that I can scarce follow the stream of your discourse. You ‘rush so immense,’ as Horace has it, that you lose not a little of your clearness. You are the most Pindaric of Prætorians.”

“You are dull, Valerius—no offence to you—I mean you provincials are always a little dull; but, to level the whole matter to your comprehension, in case you had been so lucky as to be one of the half dozen lovers, among whom the beauty, (I crave pardon, I mean the heiress of Libe-
rinus,) distributed the smiles of her widowhood—I ask you a very simple question—Whether would you have liked better to be one of those she had some thoughts

of, or *the one* she did wed? I assure you, I am quite satisfied with the result of the affair; that is to say, provided she don't change her mind before the moon, that old type of widows, has trimmed her horns again, and set forth her broad smiling face, to light up once more the heavens, that have so often witnessed her distress and her consolation."

"You talk of the moon," said I, "my dear Sabinus; I pray you, look out and see how the evening wears. Think you not I might venture to walk towards the Esquiline?"

The Centurion went out into the portico, and came back with the intelligence that there were clouds about the sky, but that he thought the moon could not fail to be up ere long.

"You shall go therefore, my dear boy," said he, "you shall go forthwith to the Esquiline; and what is more, I will go with you."

“ I will on no account suffer you,” I replied ; “ what would Trajan say, if he ever came to discover it ?”

“ Why, to tell you the truth, I believe Trajan would say very little ; that is, provided the storm were once blown over a little. I had some talk with himself last night, after that ingenious rescue of yours—and at first he spoke very bitterly ; but when once he understood how the thing had been managed, he said there could be no doubt it was done by some of their Christian friends ; and added that, after all, the fellows, whoever they were, might have killed both himself and old Palma into the bargain, if they had had a mind. This idea seemed in some measure to soften him, and he told me something—I am sure you will stare when I repeat it to you—He told me that he had heard several stories very much to the credit of Athanasia, and among the rest, what think you he particularized, but the very story which

you yourself told me you had heard from that goldsmith fellow, in the barber's shop, the night we slept at my father's. Do you remember a certain swarthy man, that sat apart in the corner, and asked questions about the Christians? I did not see him, but Virro spoke about him after I rejoined you."

"I do—I do; and I remember that he spoke in private some words to the goldsmith, and that the goldsmith looked very confused when the interview was at an end."

"No wonder—no wonder—the stranger, I will lay a year's pay on't, was no other than Trajan himself. And that story, and one or two things besides, had rendered him, I have a strong notion, extremely well disposed to have dealt lightly with Athanasia, could she have been prevailed upon to make but the least appearance of concession. And even now, I dare say, he is not in secret so very sorry about *her* es-

cape ; but that is little to the purpose, at least for the present. You know the Prefect has set a price both upon her and the old man, and I promise you it is such a temptation as no virtue, that keeps watch beneath any common prætorian breast-plate, could well be trusted to wrestle withal. But let us hope the best. Let us hope that they have lain snug and unsuspected—as why should we doubt they have done? And here, do you once more take this helmet and cloak, and remember that the pass-word of to-night is *Titus*—for there is no saying but one or more of these things may prove of some little use to you. Take the sword with you too, man—and here I am ready to attend you myself—And look ye—you, lover as you are, would never once have thought of what is the most essential of all—here is a skinful of good wine, my boy. I promise you they must stand in much need of it, after spending a whole day, and a whole night to boot, in that murderous

funereal region. I protest to you I never was there; but I take these catacombs, from your description of them, to be not much better than a second Tartarus."

CHAPTER XI.

THUS provided with all things that seemed to be necessary for our purpose, we were just about to quit the camp of the Prætorians, when a soldier of the guard presented to my friend a billet, which he had no sooner read, than I saw plainly it contained some intelligence extremely disagreeable, if not alarming to him. He seized hastily his sword, and clasping his helmet upon his head, said, in a voice of much agitation, "Come, Valerius, we have been dallying here too long. I know not what troubles you may yet have to encounter."

The tone of his voice, and the distraction of his gestures, inspired me with I know

not what of obscure dread. I felt as if I could not muster courage to interrogate him as to what he had heard, but followed him silently with rapid steps, as he moved across the Prætorian court, and so onwards by the city-wall towards the southern side of the Esquiline.

The streets of the city were all alive with the blaze of lights, and the sounds of merriment. Here crowds of idle people stood laughing around the stage of an Etrurian mountebank; there a fire was kindled by the way-side, and dust-covered labourers were forgetting the toils of the day, as they sate around frying their fish among its embers; on one side was an old cripple, around whom knots of women and children were gathered, while he sung with a gay voice, leaning upon his crutch, the glories of some great day on which the Dacians were humbled and the Danube ran red with blood; on the other hand, drum and clarion invited all, who could command three sesterces, to

witness the wonderful feats of the most sagacious elephant that had ever been disabled at the Amphitheatre of Vespasian. Here sleek men were visible within booths of canvas, knocking down "slaves—strong slaves from the north," to the highest bidders; there a squeaking hag was giving out a full and particular account of the mule that foaled, and the calf that had been brought forth with the head of a serpent, and of the three fiery meteors that had descended into the court of the Mammertine; and of all the other rueful signs and portents that had appeared at the moment when Cotilius, the Christian traitor, lost his head; also how the earth had yawned and swallowed up suddenly another hardened Christian, and a young enchantress that was his mistress, although he called her his daughter.—All, in short, were busy, and most seemed to be light of heart; and no one regarded us, as we rushed along those crowded ways, on towards the dark pine-groves

and deserted alleys of the Esquiline Gardens.

We approached the clump of thick trees, in the centre of which the cavern is situated, and forced our way again through its entangled underwood. But now the space within was not illuminated as before by a brilliant moon, for, as I have already mentioned, the sky this evening was cloudy; there was light enough, nevertheless, to shew, not only the poplar bushes that hung over the mouth of the grotto, but what I saw, alike with astonishment and alarm, two human figures, neither of them evidently such as I had expected to find in that region—one laid recumbent by the side of the fountain, the other pacing backwards and forwards, immediately in front of the entrance of the cavern.

At the first glance, as I have said, I perceived too plainly that these were not the Christian priest and Athanasia; but who or what they were, it required more exami-

nation before I could form any conjecture. I stood with the Centurion just within the edge of the woody screen, that on every side surrounded the open space,—and I stood for a moment in the breathless silence of consternation.

“Ha!” whispered he—“ha! Rubellia; too just has been your information. Perdition seize that infernal witch!”

“Pona!” said I; “alas, Sabinus, is that Pona that lies crouching there among the grass.”

“It is she—it is no other than she—and confusion gape upon her cunning! there is a Prætorian soldier by her side. Alas, my dear Caius, what is to be done? Without question, a party is within searching the catacombs.”

“Ha,” I whispered, unsheathing my sword, “let us run, Sabinus—let us rush after them into the cavern.”

“Hush!” he replied; “put up your blade, rash boy. Do you forget who I am?”

Do you think it is for me to stand by, and see you draw your sword upon the soldier of the Prince?"

"Stand still, dear Sabinus," said I,—
"stand where you are. Let me at least seek to bribe the soldier. You will not refuse to keep watch here, and prevent the witch from making her escape?"

"Valerius," said he, "I am your friend, but I cannot be witness of any of these things—I will wait beyond the thicket. Heaven grant I see you soon."

The Centurion, so saying, retreated; and I waited where I was till he had gained the exterior of the thicket. I then returned my blade into the scabbard, leaped forth boldly, and immediately accosted the soldier. He took me, of course, for one of his own order, and answered me without hesitation.

"Have they found them?" said I,—
"have they not yet discovered them, comrade?"

“They have been gone for some minutes,” he replied, “but I have heard nothing. But, as for you, I hope you don’t mean to claim any share in the reward.—Come, brother, fair play—fair play in all things. The chance is ours for this once. I pray you, walk away, like an honest fellow, and I promise you, for my part, as good a supper, and as jolly a skinful, as heart can desire.”

“I wish none of your reward,” said I; “but permit me to enter the cavern.”

“Do, at your peril,” quoth the witch, lifting herself suddenly from the ground—“Give him entrance, at your peril; and, first of all, look at his face, and see if ever you beheld it before beneath the shadow of a helmet.”

The man drew near to me, and, gazing upon my countenance, said, very scurly, “By my faith! brother, I think the old woman is in the right. Pray, when did you first wear that garb, brother? Yes, and, by Jupiter, I think the head-piece should belong

of right to nothing lower than a Centurion. Of what band, an' please you, may you be captain?"

"Soldier," said I, "there is no use in attempting to deceive you. I am neither soldier nor captain; but here is a purse of ten gold Nero's, which you may thrust under your girdle, if you will but give me permission to follow your comrades into that cavern."

"Agreed," quoth the soldier, dropping the point of his spear upon the ground, "agreed, my good friend; you speak as reasonably, I think, as any Centurion among them all."

I reached him the purse, and he, after balancing it in his hand for a moment, placed it underneath his cincture. I was then stepping forward to the mouth of the grotto; but the man instantly lifted up his spear, and, bursting into a loud laugh of scorn, said, "No, no, my good friend, that would be carrying the joke a little—just a very little too far. In the meantime, let it con-

tent you to sit down here quietly, for, may Jove devote me, but I believe you will turn out to be not much less than a Christian yourself; in which case, good brother of mine, these are not all the pieces for which I shall have to thank you."

"Thief, robber, traitor, base traitor!" I cried, and drew my sword. He stepped a pace backwards, and stood in front of the fountain, his spear stretched forth towards me in his hand. "Foul robber," I cried, "guard, or die!" and, before his thrust could reach my bosom, I had cloven asunder the shaft of his weapon, and the steel point fell at my feet among the grass, and my blade was close to his throat. He clapped his hand upon the hilt of his sword, and I struck.

He stumbled, and the well was immediately behind him, and he fell headlong backwards. I leaped upon his breast—his helmet sunk beneath the water—I stamped upon his writhing breast;—strongly, fiercely, the dying caitiff struggled; but the

struggle was brief.—I stamped—I stamped with terrible strength—and the water ceased to ripple about my feet, for I stood but on a piece of clay. A dagger, at that moment, struck from behind upon me; but the armour was true, and I only staggered from the blow. Pona flung her poniard at me with the energy of a maniac, and darted from me—howling, shrieking, screaming curses—into the dark mouth of the cavern.

I rushed after her, my bloody sword in my hand,—I rushed, as if on the wings of a tempest, into the dark cave that yawned before me—I rushed blindly, but I heard the footsteps of the flying witch, and I followed them like a blood-hound.

I gained apace upon the hag—the air brushed cool upon me, from the flapping of her garments. I touched—once and again I touched the skirts of her mantle. My hand grasped her throat—she screamed as if death had been in the touch. I arrested her flight, and relaxing for a moment my

strong grasp, said to her, passing my wet blade at the same moment across her cheek, "One breath more, and you die. Lead me truly, and I give you your life—lead me truly, Pona, and I swear to you, you shall live."

The witch trembled in my gripe, and, answering nothing, began in silence to move onwards. The place was dark, dark as midnight, but she seemed, even in her mortal terror, to have possession of some instinct, that made her tread as surely as if she had been walking under the open light of noon-day. She walked on; she turned; she walked again forwards: At last a ray of light gleamed upon me from the distant recesses of the gloom.—"Tread gently," I whispered, letting her feel again the bloody weapon. She obeyed, and trod softly, yet swiftly, and more swiftly.

We reached the low-browed arch which leads to the sepulchre of Thraso. I looked; a soldier stood with his back turned towards me, supporting himself upon his

sword. On the ground before him lay old Aurelius, pale, fainting, propped upon his hand; beside him stood Athanasia, erect, holding aloft in her hand a sword—the sword of dead Thraso—scarlet to the hilt; her face deadly pale, but her eyes gleaming like the eyes of a young lioness guarding her young; her long hair streaming wildly behind her from off her high marble brow.

I dashed the groaning witch upon the ground before me, and seized, at the same moment, from behind, the arm with which the Prætorian was leaning upon his weapon. The man resisted not, but dropped feebly upon his knees, his support being thus hastily withdrawn.—Athanasia lifted her sword yet higher over her head, and said,—“More! yet more!” and then looking again, she recognised me on the instant, and dropping her bloody blade upon the ground, she rushed into my embrace.

“O Athanasia,” said I, “what have you done? What an hour is this!”

“God will judge me!” she replied; “surely he only strengthened me when I saw Aurelius struck to the ground by the blow of the soldier. O Valerius, I am faint to death!—Oh! let us leave this dark place, if yet there be any hope before us. Let us leave this place of blood and darkness.”

“Go, go, my children,” said Aurelius, lifting himself half up from the tomb-stone on which he was lying; “go, go, my dear children, and the Lord lighten your steps!”

“My father, my dear father,” said the maiden—“Oh! I fear your wound is deep; let us bear you to the open air. Valerius, haste; haste, Caius, let us lift him to the fountain, for both with long fasting and this sad blow, our father is faint.”

“No, no,” said the old man, “it is all in vain, it is all over; leave me, leave me here with Thraso—here will I lie best. But now I thirsted for the sweet air of heaven; and now—I thirst no more! I am feeble, feeble, my children: the old blood flows slowly,

but the wound is deep. You said well the wound is deep; blessed be the name of the Lord!" The old man, with these words, sunk down again quite prostrate.

"Lift him, lift him, Caius; let us lift him together," said Athanasia. I did lift the pale old man, and he regarded me while I was doing so with a dim unconscious eye. Athanasia took the lamp, and leaving the wounded soldier and the witch together, we essayed, with what speed we could muster, to gain once more the entrance of the grotto. The marks of my feet, wet from the fountain, conducted us better than we could have had any reason to expect; and at length the penetrating breath of the night air indicated that we drew near to the object of our desire.

Athanasia started, and uttered a scream of terror, when she beheld over against the mouth of the grotto another person in the military garb, standing distinct in the moonlight; and I also started. "But fear not," said I, looking stedfastly; "now you have

no cause to fear ; 'tis my friend, the kind Centurion Sabinus."

The anxious Centurion met us as we came forth with a most troubled air, but asked not one question concerning what had passed in his absence. Perceiving only that, by whatever means, we had escaped from the dangers of the cavern, he hesitated not to offer every assistance in his power for the completion of our projected scheme ; but Athanasia thought of nothing at that moment but the wounded priest.

We laid him gently down upon the long grass, by the margin of the fountain, and Sabinus poured wine into his mouth, and water upon his face ; and after a moment, the old man revived, and opened his eyes in such a manner, that we all began to entertain some hope his wound might not prove fatal.

It was however but for a moment ; it was but the gleam in the socket—the last faint flutter of the expiring flame. Yet who

can tell how much may be compressed into the farewell moments of life? Oh, who can tell how much of fear may be mingled with how much of hope in the brief shallow draught of the unresisted cup? In dreams, years seem at times to pass on the wings of a moment. Who shall tell whether, when the body hangs already loose upon the parting soul, the same energy may not be exerted for sorrow, for joy, for memory, for foresight?

The old man propped himself upon his left hand, and Athanasia, leaning close to him, supported his hoary head upon her bosom. "Look up," said she, "my dear father! my dear Aurelius, look up once more, and bless your children!"

"My children," said the old man, gazing round with his dim eye from side to side—"my children! where are you, my boys? Aulus! Titus! Marcus! my dear gallant boys, where are you? Come close to my bed-side, brave lads; let me feel your

hands—touch me—touch me. Kiss me, my children, ere I go.” He gazed a moment, and stretched forth his hand over the fountain. “Not one of you here, my children? not one?—no, not one! Quite alone. Why do you leave me thus to die quite alone? Jupiter—Jupiter, Father of gods and men, what seest thou here? Is it seemly that an old man should be thus utterly deserted?” He paused again for some space, and then drooping his head, said, in a feeble whisper,—“Foolish, foolish old man, do’st thou call upon the dead? Can the dead hear thee? They will hear and see thee both ere long.”

“My dear Aurelius,” said Athanasia, “dream not so—look upon *us*, on *us*; we also are your children. God has made you our father; we love you as our father.”

“God! ha!—what God?” said the old man; “what God do you speak of? I charge you not to speak to me of Jupiter; Jupiter is but a vision. Would you go wor-

ship stocks and stones, children, that ye have seen hewn by the hands of sinful men like yourselves? Will you fall down to the altar of a demon? Speak, children—I charge you renounce Jupiter. Jupiter, ay, Jupiter, with his thunderbolt, and Apollo too, and Mars, bloody Mars; they are all dreams—visions. What have I to do with your dreams?”

“ We do, we do renounce them,” said Athanasia; “ your own hands have baptized us in the name of the Saviour. We are all Christians, dear father; we have no hope but in this faith.”

“ Faith! children—what is faith?” said the dying man; “ I beseech you to tell me what is Faith? Dark! dark. Oh, children, every thing is dark; to-day we crawl; to-morrow we die. Tell me, children, do you see any light before me? Poh! poh!’tis but the moon. What is Darkness? We know but the day and the night, and there may be other eyes than ours. My children!—I am faint—very faint; and yet all is dark—

Alas ! oh God ! why thus utterly am I deserted ?”

The old man dropped back heavily in the arms of Athanasia, and we hung over him for a moment, not doubting that the spirit had at length been released from its bondage. “ He is dead !” said Sabinus ; “ he is dead utterly—why linger you here ? let us fly—let us fly !” The old man opened his eyes, however, yet once again, and lifting himself up, displayed a countenance so calmly, so beautifully radiant, that he needed not to open his lips, in order to satisfy us, that Peace, and Hope, and Faith, had at last been vouchsafed to his bosom. “ My dear children,” said he, “ the cloud hath passed away—I see—I see the brightness. My God deserts me not, my children, let me bless you ere I die—Where are your hands, my children ? Give me your hand, Valerius ; and yours—give me yours also, my sweet daughter—I place them together—Let no man part them ;—Whom God hath joined let not man put asunder. The bless-

ing of God rest on you, my children—Close my old eyes ere you go—ere you go——”

He said so, and, with a gentle sigh, he breathed out his life in our arms. We closed the lids upon his eyes. We wrapped him all decently in his mantle; and Sabinus said nothing to restrain us, when we said we could not depart from the place without having laid the mortal relics of our friend in the tomb which he had prayed for in our hearing. Athanasia once again held the lamp, and I followed her, bearing the body in my arms, our feet guided by darker drops than had been aiding to us before, for all the way to the sepulchre of Thraso the ground was spotted with the blood of Aurelius.

The wounded soldier was lying in the grasp of death, and over against him sat the enchantress Pona, singing to herself one of her old charmed songs, which she interrupted not even when we reached the place where she was sitting. We lifted the flat stone from off the grave of the martyr, and

throwing up the loose sand with my sword, I committed the corpse of the holy man to the embrace of earth. I replaced the stone, and led away the weeping Athanasia.

We retraced once more our steps, hearing, for a long while after we had left the sepulchre, the song of the hideous witch singing alone amidst the darkness. Once again we breathed the air of heaven; I dipped my hands into the fountain, lest Sabinus should observe unnecessarily the bloody stains; I returned my sword into its scabbard, and prepared to obey at length the earnest entreaties of the Centurion.

As we came forth from the thicket, within whose circuit all these things had occurred, we heard the neighing of a horse, and I was at first inclined to hasten the more the steps of our flight. But Sabinus insisted on our waiting for a moment, and walked aside towards the point from which the sound proceeded. When he came back, he was leading in his hand two horses fully caparisoned; "We must not stand upon

trifles," said he, "we must make free to mount." I placed Athanasia on one of them, and vaulted on behind her. Sabinus mounted the other, and dashing into a rapid pace, we soon drew near, without having met with any interruption, to the Ostian Gate; for by that, the Centurion said, we should most easily strike into the right path to the Valerian villa, where all our friends were expecting us.

The soldiers who were on guard at the gate challenged us cheerily as we came up to them.

"The word, comrades?"

"*Titus!*" quoth the Centurion.

"Pass on—whom bear you with you, comrades?"

"A Christian—a Christian prisoner," said I.

"By Jove, that's worth gold to you, brother," quoth the guard.—"Open the gate there;—pass on, friends,—and may a curse go with your burden—I hope I shall have luck one day myself."

The Ostian Gate closed behind us, and we proceeded at a fiery pace westwards, till all the light of the suburbs was left in our rear.

CHAPTER XII.

WE rode in silence thus swiftly, till we had advanced, it may be, four or five miles on the road towards Ostium.

It was then, that on gaining the brow of an eminence more considerable than any we had yet come to, we halted for a moment, as if instinctively. On looking backwards we could still discover, by the now clear and perfect moonlight, the mighty masses of the Eternal City rising black against the horizon, high above all the intervening expanse of gardens and groves. I paused, to regard for the last time the gigantic outline, and heard, borne soft and

sweet through the serene air, the far off melancholy voice of the horn, announcing to the Prætorians the changing of the watch. The martial music of the villages around responded in succession to the note sounded from the Capitol. And then again all was silence, save the night breeze sighing among the poplars, with which our path was skirted.

“Farewell to Rome!” whispered Athanasia—“my heart tells me, Caius, that we have had our last look of the city.”

I pressed the maiden to my bosom, and we continued our course down the hill, and were soon buried among the darkness of my paternal woods.

“Perhaps you are not aware,” said the Centurion, who by this time had quite recovered himself, “that we are now riding through your own domain. Many a time, Valerius, have I hunted for bird’s nests, when I was a boy, among these fine oak woods; little did I think then, that I should

ever visit their shades under such circumstances as these. But, upon my word, there seems to be a great deal of very valuable timber here ; I think you ought to give orders about thinning the clumps, and they would have plenty of time to grow again before your return."

" Indeed, I think they would," said I ; " but, in the meantime, I shall spare them—I would not have the old groves lament over my succession."

" What a British notion !" quoth Sabinus ; " by Jove, I think you have still some tincture of your maternal Druidism about you ; but stop—Ha ! yonder is really a sight of splendour !"

He pointed through an opening among the thick trees on the right hand, and we perceived, indeed, at some distance below us by the river side, innumerable symptoms of magnificent festivity. The great arcades of the villa were blazing from end to end with lamps and torches, displaying in distinctness that almost rivalled that of

noon-day, every gilded cupola and sculptured porch, and all the long lines of marble columns that sustained the proud fabric of the Valerian mansion.

In front of the main portico, and all along the broad steps of its ascent, stood crowds of people, as if in expectation. Before them, girls and boys all clad in white raiment, were dancing on the lawn to the sound of a joyful tabor. A confused hum of gladness ascended from every part of the illuminated pile. "Come, my boy, push on cheerily," quoth the Centurion; "if you don't, we may chance after all to be too late for the great moment. The procession, it is evident, can be but a little way before us—and I, Valerius," he added in a whisper, "must not lose the benefit of the rehearsal."

At the gate-way, which opened a little farther on into the gardens, we found the two faithful freedmen, Boto and Dromo, waiting for us with horses richly caparisoned, (for they knew not how we might tra-

vel from the city,) and with change of dress for the whole of us. We passed under the porch of a small rural chapel that stood near the gate, and there Sabinus and I exchanged our military attire for the peaceful gown, in which alone we could with propriety appear in the nuptial celebration. Athanasia, for her part, threw over all her dress a long veil of white, for she alone durst not shew her face in the precincts, where of right she was mistress. We then mounted the new steeds that had been prepared for us, and dashing through the grove that edged the lawn, joined the bridal procession just at the moment when it had come in front of the villa—and all the merry clamour of shouting, and all the bursting melody of lutes and cymbals, saluted the first appearance of the curtained litter, in which the young Sempronia was borne in the midst of her attendant pomp of horsemen and chariots.

Conspicuous in front of all rode, in his lofty car, the Flamen of Jupiter, arrayed

in his long purple robe, and wearing on his head the consecrated diadem. The priestess of Apollo, too, was there, surrounded with all her damsels, ruling, or seeming to rule with her own hand, the milk-white horses of the sun that pawed the ground before her burnished wheels. Gay horsemen checked their steeds amidst the blaze of torches, and the peals of music. White-robed damsels and youths, advancing from the portal, chaunted the Hymenæan. Far and wide nuts and rose-buds were scattered among the torch-bearing throng. Young Sextus leaped from his horse, and the litter touched the ground, and the bride, wrapped all over in her saffron-coloured veil, was lifted, gently struggling, over the anointed threshold. Sabinus swelled the hymenæal chorus with his ever-cheerful voice; while poor Athanasia—my own unsaluted bride—she stood apart from all the clamour, gazing through her veil—it may be through her tears—upon the festal pageant.

We ventured not into the blazing hall, till all the rest had entered it. The symbolic fleece had already been shorn from the spotless lamb, and all were preparing to pass into the chambers beyond, where the tables appeared already covered with the wedding-feast. Every one was glad, and every one was busy, and no one regarded us as we stood beneath the pillars of the hall,—contemplating the venerable images of my ancestors, that were arranged all around us—from the mouldered bust of the great Publicola, down to the last of the lineage, the princely Cneius, whose inheritance was and was not mine. There were moments, I cannot conceal it, in which some feelings of regret were mingled with the admiration, which I could not refuse to the spectacle of all the ancient grandeur that for the first, and for the last time, I was gazing on. But Athanasia leaned upon me as I stood there, and all things seemed well, when I felt the pressure of her bosom.

Ere long, Dromo approached us, and led us aside from the scene of all the noisy merriment into an upper chamber, where, divested of her veil, the lovely bride of Sextus stood waiting to fold Athanasia in one parting embrace to her bosom. I turned aside, and witnessed not their farewell tears.

Licinius, Lucius, Velius, and the Priestess came into the bridal chamber, with the wreathed cup. It was then that, in their presence, I proclaimed Athanasia for my bride. They kissed her pale cheek—once and again she returned the salute—and with slow steps we took our departure. Sabinus, the good Sabinus, walked along with us down the dark alley that led to the river side. The two freedmen were already sitting at their oars—we bade adieu to the Centurion—tenderly the kind man bade us both adieu—and I lifted my Athanasia, weeping natural tears devoid of bitterness, into the little boat which had been prepared for us.

Dromo began, as we pushed off from the shore, to chaunt an old British boat-song of his, which I had heard a thousand times, without thinking any thing about it, but which now, I know not how, seemed to me to breathe the very spirit of pensiveness and repose. Athanasia, wrapped in her long cloak, leaned herself like a bride upon my bosom, and I looked back upon the illuminated mansion, and thought almost that there was something of distastefulness in the mirthful strains that still echoed from its dome. Slowly the measured oars divided the dark waters, and gladder hearts have been floated upon the calm breast of Tiber—but none calmer, none happier than ours.

“ Dear Boto,” said I, “ methinks that is a fine old song of yours ; yet you know that I have brought a bride with me to-night, and surely you choose a very melancholy strain.”

“ My dear master,” he replied, “ I thought not my dear lady would take any notice of

my song ; but 'tis one that the Silurian boatmen sing whenever they are on the water at the midnight. It was made, they say, by one of their old chiefs, as they rowed him away one night over the sea to Mona—after all his kindred had been slain, and his village burned in the woods by the Romans—and it seemed to me, my dear master, that we, too, were now rowing away from them, for they are as cruel now as they were in the old time. Pardon me for what I say, but you were always with us, my dear master, from your childhood ; and your mother is one of our own race, and I cannot help thinking of you as one of ourselves.”

“ My dear Boto,” said I, “ sing on, if it please you, and I will tell your lady what I can of the meaning of your song.”

He obeyed, and resumed his mournful strain—the same which, I dare say, you have heard him sing when he was old.

“ The night is dark above the water,
The hills are all behind us far ;

We cannot see the hill of slaughter,
Where in their tents the steel-clad Romans are.

Row gently through the gentle sea—
Row gently, for my wound is deep—
Soon, soon in safety shall ye be—
And I, too, brothers,—for I fain would sleep.

Our own old oaks stand scathed with fires,
Around the roofs for which we bled—
The bones of our unconquer'd sires,
Stir in their cairns—for sorrow moves the dead.

Row gently, for my wound is deep—
And sadness fills my weary eyes—
Row gently, for I fain would sleep—
I fain would sleep, and never more arise.”

So glided we down the deep calm stream of
Tiber.

At the place upon which we had fixed
in the morning, we were hailed from the
shore by Silo, and, having taken him in, re-
ceived the welcome intelligence, that he had
secured for our use a very light and conve-
nient bark, the master of which had intend-
ed sailing in the course of the day that was
just over for New Carthage, but had will-
ingly delayed for a few hours, in order that

he might not lose the gain of carrying us along with him. "From that part of Spain," said Silo, "there can be no difficulty in procuring some vessel bound for our native island. My little daughter is already on board, under the keeping of the master. All at Ostium is sleep and silence, and the tide flows fair over the sand, so we shall be, ere day-break, far out upon our course."

We found the vessel, such as he had described her, lying somewhat apart from the multitude of galleys that throng at all periods the great sea-port of the capital. The zealous Dromo, not without much emotion, there parted from us, and, laden with gifts, not of form, but of thankfulness, began to row himself alone up the river, back to the villa, at which I understood his habitation was now to be fixed.

"Farewell, my kind master," he said, as he was about to push off his shallop from under the side of the vessel—"Farewell, my kind Master Valerius—may all the gods, wherever and whatever they be, grant you

smooth water and fair wind—and may both you and my fair lady—not forgetting my good friend, Boto, whose education I can scarcely be said to have begun—soon, very soon, come back to us, in times when ye shall have no need to look upon your own house lighted up for the feasts of others—nor to be rowed away down Tiber by midnight, and carried back to that island, which, for all that you say of it, is, I suspect, a cold and miserable place, saving your presence, in comparison of my native Crete. Farewell! sweet winds blow upon you—Have you no last message for any of your friends that you are leaving behind you?”

“Give my love to them all,” I replied—
“Your master Sextus.”

“My patron Sextus!” quoth the new freed-man, correcting me.

“Your pardon, Dromo—your patron Sextus, and your old patron his father, and your young lady, for I am sure you will allow me to call her so—and, last of all, the

next time you see him, to your good friend and mine, the Centurion."

"I will, I will," quoth the Cretan; "and since you have said it, sir, I believe he has as much reason to think me his friend, as any man in Rome, slave though I was, and poor freed-man as I am ever like to be. I will tell you, when we meet next, some pretty stories; and long long before that day comes, Sabinus, let me tell you, will be lord, as he well deserves to be, of one of the prettiest ladies, and one of the prettiest houses, too, that can be found this night within the four walls of the city you have quitted. But, I dare say, he told you all—did he tell you before you parted about his wedding? Heaven bless me! first and last, what a job that pretty widow has been to me! But no matter, 'tis all well now—Sextus has in his arms all that he desired to have; and Sabinus, I think, is at least good enough for the lady he is to have in a day or two. Although, after all, to speak truth,

I don't know why she should be ill-spoken of for any thing that has passed. She followed her fancy, and who can blame her for doing so? But as for Xerophrastes, I confess I am glad Master Longbeard has taken to the Tub at last. Oh! how it will tickle my bones to stand by when I fall in with him, and hear him declaiming after his new fashion. I shall buy a bunch of green grapes that day, were I to pay their weight in brass for them, just that I may have the pleasure of sticking them up on the wall, right before the face of the old fox."

"Good bye, Dromo; you are still the same man, I perceive.—Good bye—commend me to all—and commend me, in all reverence, to Xerophrastes, too, when you encounter him."

"Good bye, once more, master," cried the gay Cretan, and pushed off with all his vigour. We loosened our hawsers a moment after, and stretched our sails before a breeze as favourable as he had been wishing us.

An awning had been erected on the stern

by the providence of the jailor. Thither Athanasia and I now retired, while the mariners plied their strength, and Silo and Boto went to sleep upon the deck. But gladly did we hail the open sea, when our bark emerged upon its surface—gladly did we peep forth to see the clear deep shining below us like a second dark blue firmament, so truly was it giving back the reflection of the innumerable stars that shone in the serene sky over-head. The bark skimmed the calm surface of the waters like a sea-bird. The sailors whistled joyously to the prospering gale.

The sun was riding high in the heavens when we looked forth on the morrow—air and sea were sleeping all around beneath the fervid glow of the day-star, and far, far eastwards, the blue shores of Italy lay behind us like the shadows of a dream.

FINIS.

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

[Although the two following Letters are well known both to classical scholars, and to the readers of works on Church History ; yet it has been thought that they might be added in this place without impropriety. The preceding pages may happen to be perused by persons who have never seen any of the collections in which these letters are to be found—and they afford by far the best and most authentic illustration, both of the manner in which the subject of Christianity was regarded by the polite Romans of the day of Trajan—and of the principles upon which that Prince regulated his conduct in regard of the adherents of the New Faith.]

PLINY TO TRAJAN.*

IT is a rule, sir, which I inviolably observe, to refer myself to you in all my doubts ; for who is more capable of removing my scruples, or informing my

* Book X. Letter 97.

ignorance? Having never been present at any trials concerning those who profess Christianity, I am unacquainted, not only with the nature of their crimes, or the measure of their punishment, but how far it is proper to enter into an examination concerning them. Whether, therefore, any difference is usually made with respect to the ages of the guilty, or no distinction is to be observed between the young and the adult; whether repentance entitles them to a pardon; or, if a man has been once a Christian, it avails nothing to desist from his error; whether the very profession of Christianity, unattended with any criminal act, or only the crimes themselves inherent in the profession, are punishable; in all these points I am greatly doubtful. In the meanwhile, the method I have observed towards those who have been brought before me as Christians is this: I interrogated them whether they were Christians? if they confessed, I repeated the question twice, adding threats at the same time; and, if they still persevered, I ordered them to be immediately punished. For I was persuaded, whatever the nature of their opinions might be, a contumacious and inflexible obstinacy certainly deserved correction. There were others also brought before me possessed with the same infatuation; but, being citizens of Rome, I directed that they should be carried thither. But

this crime spreading, (as is usually the case) while it was actually under prosecution, several instances of the same nature occurred. An information was presented to me, without any name subscribed, containing a charge against several persons ; these, upon examination, denied they were, or ever had been, Christians. They repeated, after me, an invocation to the gods, and offered religious rites, with wine and frankincense, before your statue ; (which, for that purpose, I had ordered to be brought, together with those of the gods,) and even reviled the name of Christ ; whereas there is no forcing, it is said, those who are really Christians into any of these compliances. I thought it proper, therefore, to discharge them. Some, among those who were accused by a witness in person, at first confessed themselves Christians, but immediately after denied it ; the rest owned, indeed, they had been of that number formerly ; but had now (some above three, others more, and a few above twenty years ago) renounced that error. They all worshipped your statue, and the images of the gods, uttering imprecations at the same time against the name of Christ. They affirmed, the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they met on a certain stated day before it was light, and addressed themselves

in a form of prayer to Christ, as to some god, binding themselves by a solemn oath, not for the purposes of any wicked design, but never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery ; never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up. After which, it was their custom to separate, and then re-assemble, to eat in common a harmless meal. From this custom, however, they desisted after the publication of my edict, by which, according to your commands, I forbade the meeting of any assemblies. In consequence of this their declaration, I judged it the more necessary to endeavour to extort the real truth, by putting two female slaves to the torture, who were said to officiate in their religious functions ; but all I could discover was, that these people were actuated by an absurd and excessive superstition. I deemed it expedient, therefore, to adjourn all farther proceedings, in order to consult you. For it appears to be a matter highly deserving your consideration ; more especially, as great numbers must be involved in the danger of these prosecutions, which have already extended, and are still likely to extend, to persons of all ranks and ages, and even of both sexes. In fact, this contagious superstition is not confined to the cities only, but has spread its

infection among the neighbouring villages and country. Nevertheless, it still seems possible to restrain its progress. The temples, at least, which were once almost deserted, begin now to be frequented; and the sacred solemnities, after a long intermission, are revived: to which I must add, there is again also a general demand for the victims, which for some time past had met with but few purchasers. From the circumstances I have mentioned, it is easy to conjecture what numbers might be reclaimed, if a general pardon were granted to those who shall repent of their error.

TRAJAN TO PLINY.*

THE method you have pursued, my dear Pliny, in the proceedings against those Christians which were brought before you, is extremely proper; as it is not possible to lay down any fixed rule by which to act in all cases of this nature. But I would not have you *officially* enter into any inquiries concerning them. If, indeed, they should be brought before you, and the crime should be proved, they must be punished; with this restriction, however, that

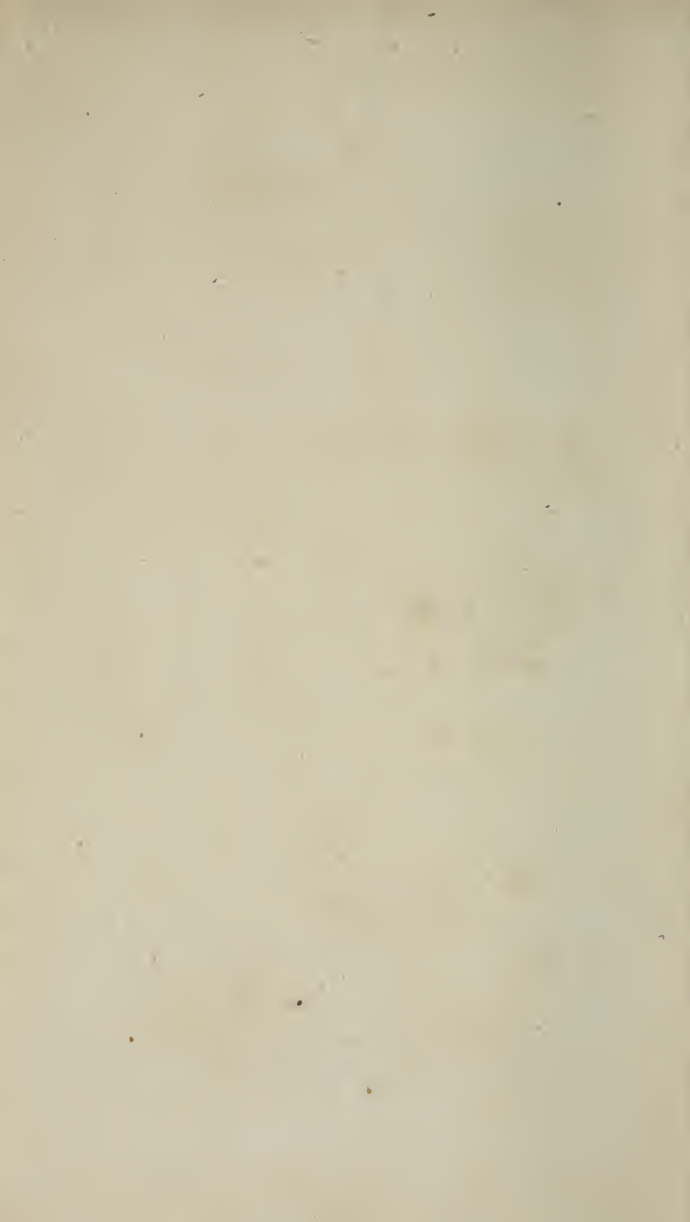
* Book X. Letter 98.

where the party denies he is a Christian, and shall make it evident that he is not, by invoking our Gods; let him (notwithstanding any former suspicion) be pardoned upon his repentance. Informations without the accuser's name subscribed, ought not to be received in prosecutions of any sort; as it is introducing a very dangerous precedent, and by no means agreeable to the equity of my government.

EDINBURGH :

Printed by James Ballantyne & Co.







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