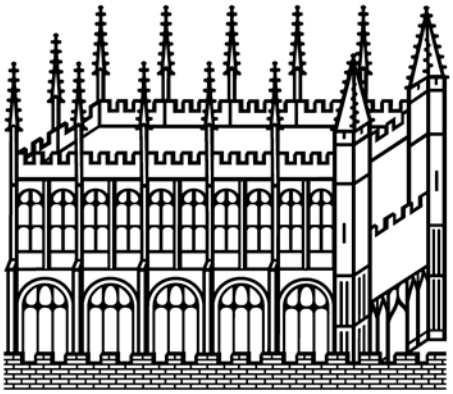

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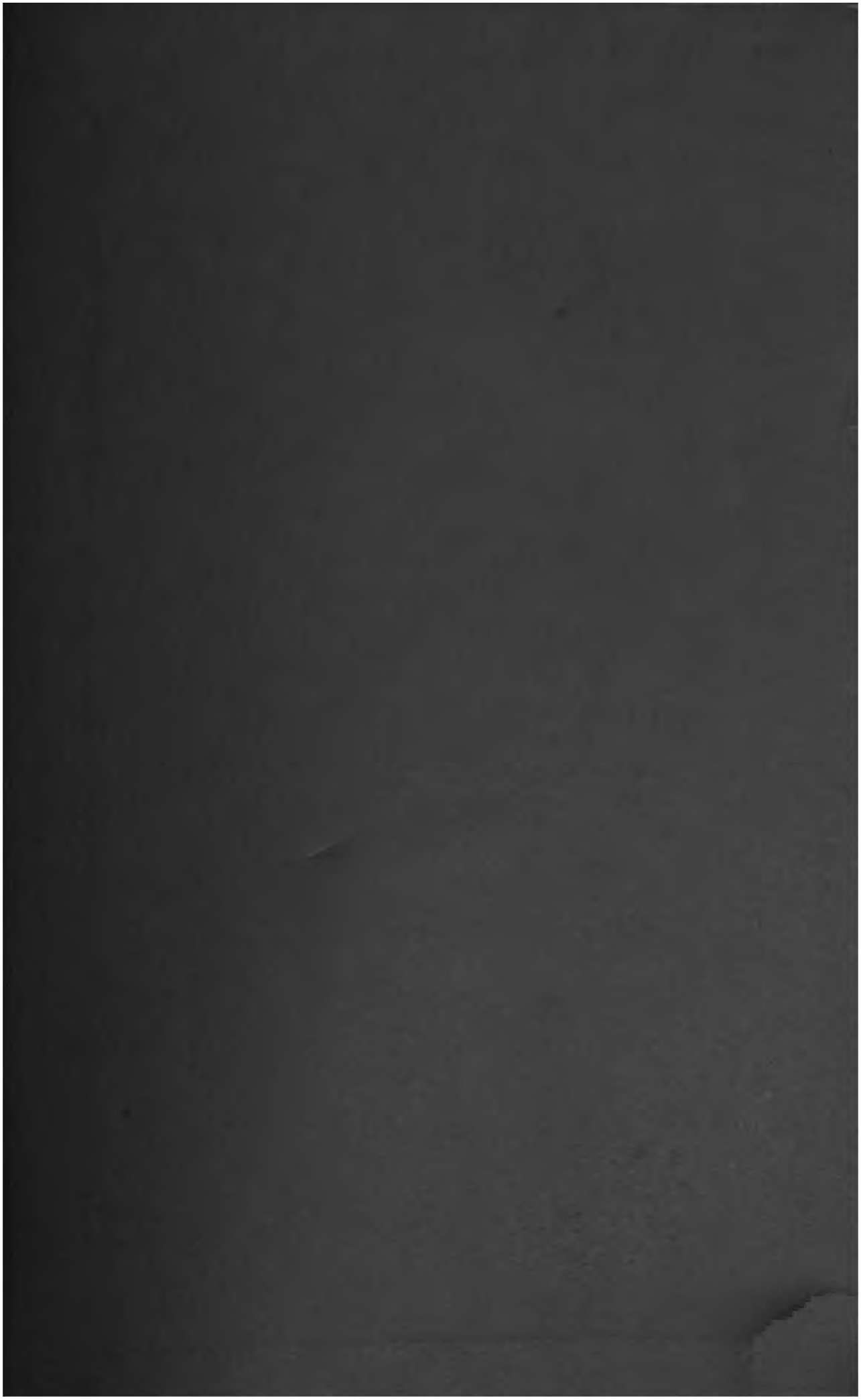

ÆMILIUS.

OXFORD:

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1871.

Æmilius:

A TALE OF THE DECIAN & VALERIAN PERSECUTIONS.

"Like sheep their blood they poured:
And without groan or tear,
They bent before the sword
For Him their King most dear:
Empurpled in the flood
Of their victorious blood,
They won the laurel from their GOD."

Oxford:
A. R. MOWBRAY & CO.

London:
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL & CO.

1871.

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PREFACE.

THE Author of this tale is the Chaplain of a School. One of the chief problems he has had to solve, in the course of his experience, has been the task of making the leisure hours of Sunday happy to boys, in the absence of their customary amusement and occupations.

The expedient which has best solved the difficulty has been the telling of original tales, embodying some of the many striking incidents in the history of the Church, or descriptive of the lives of our spiritual ancestors in the days of persecution and trial.

One of these tales, at the suggestion of many friends, he now commits to the press with much diffidence, hoping it may prove as interesting to those who read as to those who heard, yet painfully conscious of the many imperfections of his work.

The leading events of the tale are historical facts, which it has been the aim of the Author

to render correctly, while he has also studied the usages of antiquity in his description of early Christian ritual.

The close adherence to history at which he has aimed, has caused the catastrophe of his story to bear some resemblance to the tragic fate of Pompeii, so vividly described by an eminent genius; the author can only plead that the destruction of Antioch by the Persians, while its inhabitants were in the Amphitheatre, occurred as he has endeavoured to describe it.

The same excuse must be pleaded for the introduction of the supernatural element: the Author has but described scenes similar to those which abound in the legends of the period.

His sole object in telling as in writing the tale, has been to influence youthful minds by examples drawn from the bright records of the age of the martyrs, and he dedicates his little book, with much affection, to those who first listened to its story.

A. D. C.

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ÆMILIUS: A TALE OF THE DECIAN AND VALERIAN PERSECUTIONS.

CHAPTER I.

THE AMPHITHEATRE.

IT was the month of September in the year of grace 250, and the autumn sun was gilding the towers and pinnacles of Antioch with the tints of early morn.

Lovely indeed was the scenery around this favoured city; situated at the entrance of a fine alluvial plain, near the spot where the Orontes enters the defile which conducts it to the sea; from each side of the mighty stream rose her temples and palaces; while quays of white marble, crowded with merchandize, bore witness to the magnitude of her commerce. Above the quays the river was spanned by five bridges of noble workmanship, and the island upon which many of her most considerable edifices were built was thus connected with the shore; here rose the palace of the legatus, or Roman governor, for Antioch was the capital of an imperial province, while a triumphal arch yet remained which commemorated the con-

quests of Antiochus the Great, long since swallowed up by the might of all-conquering Rome.

To the north of the stream rose the gentle slopes of wooded hills, beyond which a rugged chain of mountains cleft the skies, its peaks reddening in the light of coming day, while on the opposite side of the stream, rose Mount Silpius, its twin summits crowned, the one with the graceful fane of Jupiter Capitolinus, the other with the Citadel frowning upon precipitous rocks which might well bid defiance to the skill of the besieger.

From their summits the eye embraced a panorama unequalled in beauty,—the aqueducts, baths, and basilica of the Eastern portion of the city; the main street with its graceful colonnades on each side stretching from the base of Silpius a league towards the west; the forum; the quays which, farther west, lined the stream as it glided towards the sea, emulating the blue of the heavens themselves until lost in the defile; the mountain ranges endlessly succeeding each other, until terminated northwards by the great range of Pierius, and on the south by that mighty peak of Casius, rising five thousand feet towards the skies; upon which Seleucus the founder of the city offered sacrifice while he watched the flight of birds until an eagle bearing away a portion of the victim to the shore of the Orontes, at the foot of Mount Silpius, determined the future site of Antioch.

It was a city in which commerce and gain contended with luxury and pleasure for the hearts of the people. There dwelt luxurious Romans, weary of the turmoil of mighty Rome, content to spend their declining days where Germanicus and his noble wife also spent theirs; here dwelt thousands

of Greeks, too often, alas, unworthy to bear a name once borne by Socrates or Epaminondas; but the Syrians composed the bulk of the population; the rabble united the vices of the east and west. Here the passion for games and spectacles knew no limit; here oriental astrologers and soothsayers found credulous disciples; here vices Christians may not name flourished in rank luxuriance, not merely permitted, but deified and consecrated by art and poetry.

For on the south-west of the city lay the scene of the latest development of heathen abominations, the famous Daphne, with its lovely shrine; its groves; its gardens; its fountains; its statue of the Pythian god; its licentious crowds of worshippers, where, under the pure bright sun of heaven, vice had chosen its haunt, and appropriated to itself all that was beautiful in art or nature.

Yet in this very Antioch the disciples were first called Christians; this was one of the four great sees of Christendom, consecrated by the personal teaching of Apostles, watered by the Blood of Martyrs.

Such was Antioch, when the old dying superstition, with its blasphemies and vices, contended with the living Faith of the Church.

But on this day no sound of hammer announced the presence of the sons of toil; there was no stir amidst the shipping; no business on the quay; the shops were closed; and all seemed hastening to one common source of attraction.

There it was—the Amphitheatre, built in the most conspicuous position of the city, after the model of the Colosseum at Rome,—the glory, yet the shame of Antioch. There the proud Roman and licentious Greek, the freeman and the slave, struggled for

place, that they might view to greater advantage the strife, and the agony of their fellow-creatures.

From the first glimpse of the dawn, the *locarii*, who kept seats for those who could pay them, had besieged the entrances, and now, although but early in the day, every seat had its occupant, and upon that little desert of sand, the arena, the eyes of tens of thousands were gazing.

Only the places reserved for those of high rank remained unfilled, nor were they long untenanted. Near the throne of the Roman governor, a seat was reserved, towards which six persons were now moving. The first was a man whose commanding presence, and stern warlike mien, bespoke the Roman soldier, but his grey locks showed that his days of service were over; on his arm leaned his wife, a frail delicate lady, whose steps he tended with assiduous care; and behind followed his son and daughter; the boy of that age when boyhood passes into youth; the girl a year or two younger. Arriving at their seats, they looked round as though they missed some companions for whom two seats were yet reserved.

"See," said the boy, "here come my aunt and cousin, and only just in time, for the legatus is taking his seat."

A lady, accompanied by a boy about the age of the speaker, appeared; they gracefully saluted their friends, and took the vacant places, the lady next her kinswoman, leaving the two boys to sit together. And thus placed the most careless eye could but have noticed the striking difference in their physiognomy; Æmilius, the one first introduced to notice, possessed the strongly-marked features, the fiery eye, and the conscious superiority which were

the distinctive marks of the mighty Roman race. On the other hand, Eucrates was a Greek, although the cousin of Æmilius; the relationship was on their mothers' side; two sisters, the daughters of a wealthy native of Antioch, whose names were Æmilia and Melissa, having married, the one a retired Roman general named Cornelius, already introduced to our readers, the other a rich Greek colonist, named Sophron, who was now dead.

And no one who looked upon the boy could help seeing that he was a Greek, yet not in that sense of the word in which one would have applied it to Miltiades or Epaminondas; the race had, alas, greatly degenerated, and, in spite of classic beauty of feature, there was that in the expression of his face which spoke of untamed passions, and suggested mistrust.

But a flourish of trumpets announced that the legatus had taken his seat, and that the games were about to begin. Every eye was fixed upon the passages leading from the caveæ into the arena; in some instances with excitement half sickening in its intensity; in others with the thirst for blood craving for gratification.

What a lesson for those who prate of civilization as having softened the world, that is, civilization without Christianity; here in the third century was such a civilization in full existence, and men and women who possessed the most exquisite works of art, who were clad in the softest raiment, and breathed the odour of choice perfumes, who spent their time in rhapsodies over paintings, poetry, sculpture, or music, who possessed all art can give to soften the mind; here they were, seeking their pastime, not in the drama, not in the imaginary

scenes of Terence or Plautus, but in witnessing the agonies and the death of their fellow creatures.

And our readers must pardon us, if here, and elsewhere in the course of this history, no attempt is made to soften the cruel and repulsive features of Paganism; it is better to speak of things as they were, and Christians may thereby take courage, and thank God that the work of the Church has not been useless to thousands who yet are alien to her fold.

The iron-bound door, which led to the principal vaults beneath the seats of the spectators, creaked on its hinges, and a group of men appeared, bearing various weapons, and variously clad.

There was the *retiarius* dressed in a short tunic, with a trident in his left hand, and a net in his right; the *secutor* with sword, buckler, and helmet fashioned like the head of a fish, who fought with him; and the pugilists who contended with the cestus, naked to the waist; there were those in close-fitting white tunics, who fought only with the foils or sword for thrusting; Thracians who bore shield and broad-sword; and the Anabatæ who fought on horseback with the head and eyes alone covered; much to the amusement of the populace.

They paused at the entrance, then marched two and two, as they were to fight, round the arena, making the accustomed salutation before the throne of the legatus. "Ave! morituri te salutant!"

The first act of the game was now on the point of commencing; two gladiators in linen tunics, bearing no defensive armour, but only pointed swords, which were to serve as sword and shield at once, stepped forward; arriving at the centre of the arena,

they paused, then faced each other, the next moment their blades crossed and the clash of steel sent a thrill through the assembly, while the gaze of each individual became fixed as though his own life depended upon those blades of bright blue metal.

Attack succeeded atttack, parry succeeded parry, but so consummate was the skill of the combatants that it was many minutes ere the white linen tunics which they wore revealed the stain of blood, and many wounds were given and received before one began to show signs of weakness. Immediately the voices of the betters might be heard offering great odds upon the other. The successful combatant was a dark Syrian, his opponent a light-featured native of Britain, and the Syrian populace shouted for joy as they perceived the white tunic of the stranger acquire the deep red hue. He too saw that all would soon be over, unless some desperate effort on his part prevented; by a sudden feint he seemed to expose the whole of his left side to the thrust of his antagonist, thus eliciting a desperate attack, but he had staked his all upon this move, the sword of the Syrian simply grazed the flesh as it passed under the left arm, while the Briton driving his weapon over the sword of the other, as he strove to recover his guard, completely transfixed him before the astonished spectators.

The wounded gladiator fell backwards, strove to raise himself upon his elbow, seemed to appeal to the mercy of the spectators, but the shout of applause at his rival's victory rent the air, and his life-blood ebbed away with it.

An ass, to the harness of which a rope and a hook was attached, was now driven on to the arena, and the hook being inserted in the corpse, it was

dragged away, the arena sprinkled with fresh sand, and the spectators breathed again.

The combat between the retiarius and the secutor followed; the net was thrown, and missed its aim; the bearer, swift of foot, fled round the arena, pursued by his foe, as he strove to gather up the folds for another cast, knowing that if overtaken before this was done, he was inevitably lost; but such was not the case, and the secutor pursued in vain.

At the same moment two sturdy boxers, having their hands encircled by bands of leather to which plates of iron were affixed, which rendered the fist a most deadly weapon, commenced their operations, and divided the attention of the spectators.

But the critical moment of the other combat approached; the retiarius turning sharply round when his enemy was close upon him, cast the net over the head and shoulders of his adversary; entangled thus the sword was useless, and the victim helpless as a fish in the net.

The conquering retiarius looked around; the spectators were disgusted with the want of skill shown by the swordsman, there was no mercy for him; in ominous silence the thumbs were pressed down, the legatus gave the signal, and the trident was plunged again and again in the body of the writhing victim, while shouts of delight rent the air.

At the same moment the combat with the cestus was decided, the skull of one combatant being fractured by his opponent.

"I hope they are going to have warmer work than this," said Eucrates to his mother; "why, at Rome, I am told, they sometimes turn a hundred gladiators into the arena at once."

"Yes," replied his uncle, Cornelius, "but you

must remember that we are not at Rome. A colonial city can only hope to imitate *her* at a humble distance, but we shall have more exciting work immediately; there are several criminals and runaway slaves condemned to the beasts."

"And serve them right, too," said Eucrates; "I should like to catch Juba running away."

The combat of the anabatæ now excited the attention of the speakers: the mixture of comedy and tragedy produced roars of laughter as the unfortunate men strove to attack or defend, judging of their position by the hearing, or by the contact of the weapons alone, for they were both blindfolded, but one of the combatants was soon disabled, and this time the audience were disposed to mercy, so he escaped with life.

The spectators now became more excited, and expectation was strained to the utmost, as the crier by the side of the legatus shouted, "Bring forth the criminals and the beasts." Soon the gaolers reappeared leading in six unfortunate wretches, naked save a fold of cloth around the loins.

Death in its most horrible shape was before them, and they knew it; the sweat stood in drops upon their brows; there were thousands of pitiless eyes waiting simply to feast upon their agonies, and their mute gestures of despair only heightened the thirst for blood.

There was the wealth and fashion of Antioch; the old, the young, the boy, the girl, and the *mothers*; yes, from the seats around the legatus, the eye sank back, dazzled by the brilliant hues of the robes, and the sparkle of the gems; there were lovely faces, soft voluptuous eyes, but the blood-fever had seized them, they craved sensation, and thus they found it!

Concealed apparatus, diffused over the roof, sprinkled exquisite perfumes; soft music filled the air; contrast was aimed at, the woe of the few was the luxury of the many.

Suddenly a hideous roar arose; forth from the iron grate, now open, rushed the lions; then followed human screams, the cracking of bones, and the shouts of the delighted, nay delirious, populace. So it continued till a sudden hush came over the scene; it was over, and the victims had carried their appeal to the judgment seat on high.

When we read of the fate which at last overtook that mighty empire which had demoralised the world, and substituted these bloody spectacles for the Isthmian or Olympic games; can we help seeing that Goths, Huns, and Vandals were but the instruments of Him Who has said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay?"

But the day was not yet over, and expectation still sat on the faces of the spectators, bets were yet interchanged, and one general topic of interest seemed to pervade the conversation.

"Father," said Æmilius, "I hope he has given way."

"So do not I," replied Eucrates.

"Why, have you not had blood enough? is he not our old schoolfellow?"

"Yes, and I always hated him; he never could do this, and never could do that, this was wrong and that was wrong."

"Eucrates," said his uncle Cornelius, "you forget you speak of the son of a Roman citizen; it is all very well to see criminals suffer, but even the immortal Decius might spare us the disgrace of a scene like this; see he comes, I hope the legatus will do his best to save him, poor boy."

During this interval the keepers of the beasts clad in suits of complete armour, had entered armed with rods of iron, heated at the points, and had driven in the beasts from their horrid repast; slaves had then entered, and had gathered up the bones and fragments of flesh which remained; sprinkling the arena as usual they retired.

And then a door opened, and a young boy, led by a single officer, appeared, clad in a thin white tunic, his arms meekly folded, and took his place in the centre of the arena. There was no sign of fear on that fair, nay lovely face, but a radiant hope seemed to light it up with joy. Æmilius gazed upon him and the tears started to his eyes. Eucrates gazed with the cold glance of dislike.

Every tongue was hushed, until the legatus broke the silence.

"Fidenatus, thou art brought here to die, doomed by the laws to the death of a slave, since thou hast chosen the faith of one; but yet for the sake of thy father, whom the gods have taken lest he should see this day, we offer thee mercy,—thy life, and restoration to thy paternal honours."

Every ear was strained to listen, as a calm sweet voice replied.

"My lord, I have chosen; I need no mercy, I have come here to die for Him Who died for me."

The legatus drew a deep breath, so did Cornelius, his wife, son, and daughter. Melissa and her son remained unmoved.

"Dost thou know," said the legatus, "the fate that awaits thee? dost thou not fear the leopard?"

"My lord, I have spoken; He has taken away fear; to me to die is gain."

"He? of Whom do you speak?"

"Of Him Who was crucified for me."

Instantly shouts of derision and also of rage rent the air, demoniacal exultation on the part of those who had betted on the endurance of the boy, rage on the part of the others; amidst these outcries the boy stood perfectly unmoved.

There was a sudden hush: a leopard was unloosed. The beast, savage for want of food, first rushed round and round the circuit, as if he sought his food above, then perceiving the boy, he paused, crouched, drew nearer and nearer, like a cat pursuing a bird.

Fidenatus saw him, and signed himself with the cross, folded his arms, and fixed his eyes without fear on the ferocious beast; there was a rush, a bound, the throat was torn open, the blood poured forth, and all was over.

The crowd poured out through the vomitoria, betters reckoned their gain or loss, the streets became flooded again with life, the sun set, that earthly sun he would see no more; the moon rose and silvered the waters of the Orontes with her brilliant light, the towers, the palaces, the shipping glowed in her beams.

But under the altar the souls were yet crying, "How long, O Lord, how long?"

And he, the martyr boy, who shall tell where he was? who shall speak of that Paradise he had entered, where a mother, who like him had died for the faith, awaited him?

"Ah in those moments of strife what years of agony centred!
"Ah in the land without time which they led to, what pleasures eternal!"

CHAPTER II.

THE VILLA. A DAY IN THE WOODS.

A FEW miles from Antioch, upon the slope of a richly wooded hill, which rose gently to the north-east, stood the villa of Cornelius.

Nature had surrounded the spot with such beauty of scenery that art had little left to do, yet all her resources had been also called forth, through the agency of boundless riches, to adorn the home of the wealthy Roman.

Beneath the hill, towards the south-west, flowed the Orontes; beyond, the buildings of the city gladdened the eye, and added life and animation to the scene, while the view embraced the scenery already described as far as the shrine of distant Daphne.

Groups of trees, growing as nature had placed them, gave the domain the appearance of a modern park; beneath the spot where these isolated groups were succeeded by dense forest, stood the villa.

The front, looking towards the south-west, formed a portico resting on pillars of Corinthian design, before which extended terraces, with gravelled walks, separated by flower beds, while the declivity towards the park was planted with costly shrubs, and covered

with flowers, which gradually seemed to become lost amidst the natural verdure of the hill.

Behind the colonnade, the main entrance led to the *Atrium*, or hall, decorated with images of the Cornelii of ancient days, its pillars resting upon an elaborate pavement of variegated marble and forming colonnades, from the inner side of which small apartments, destined for various uses, opened. Beyond the Atrium two passages led to the *Peristylium*—a court surrounded by columns; between these lay the *Tablinum*, or Dining-room. In the centre of the Peristylium was a fountain which cast up perfumed waters, and the roof above was open to the sky, the opening corresponding in size to the *Impluvium*, or basin of the fountain.

The interior of the court around the Impluvium was covered with the softest turf, upon which rested vessels wherein grew choice shrubs and flowers which filled the air with their fragrance, while exquisite creeping plants were entwined around the pillars.

From the colonnade, supported by these pillars, apartments opened, appropriated to the members of the family or to visitors, while a grand dining-hall for state occasions terminated the court. These different chambers were arranged with every attention to comfort; the sitting-rooms so placed as to catch the charming views on every side, the bed chambers so as to exclude every sound.

Then there were the bath rooms; the gymnasium, adapted for all kinds of physical recreation; the library, containing the choicest works of eminent authors, Roman and Greek; the aviary, crowded with captives of the brightest plumage or the richest gifts of song; all that luxury could suggest found its home here.

Around the villa lay the gardens, where art had imitated yet outraged nature by clipping plants and shrubs so as to present every conceivable variety of figure. But beyond these bounds lay a perfect paradise where art had but *assisted;* here shady groves, alternated with smooth lawns, through which a brook meandered, now leaping over artificial cascades, now forming miniature lakes in which gold or silver fish darted and glittered ; while beautiful statues looked out from rich foliage, as if the fabled nymphs had chosen this sweet spot for their retreat. And, beyond all this, on the outskirts of the forest, an avenue of plane trees existed ; creeping plants trained from tree to tree almost excluded the light, while the soft murmur of the stream which flowed down the middle of the grove invited to repose.

This was the favourite retreat of the family in the heat of summer : the perfume of the flowers captivated the senses, while the murmur of the stream lulled to sleep.

On the morrow succeeding the scene in the Amphitheatre, a young slave might have been seen standing outside the door of one of the sleeping apartments which opened from the Peristylium. He was clad in a simple tunic of white linen, with sleeves extending only to the elbow, the lower extremities of the robe descending to the knees ; his dress was utterly devoid of any attempt at ornament, yet worn with great neatness. He was a singularly handsome boy, with features from which Grecian sculptors might have graved Apollo ; yet it was not the beauty of the features, but an expression at once sweet and sad which interested the gazer. He appeared like one who had a hard lot to sustain,—on whom deep sorrow had left its mark, yet who strove to bear it

nobly. And he now knocked lightly at the door of his sleeping master, for he was the slave of Æmilius, the son of Cornelius.

About the house or on the estate of Cornelius were nearly a hundred slaves. There was no limit at the period in question to the number a master might possess, or to the tyranny he might exercise over them. These unhappy beings were far more completely in the power of their masters than dogs or horses are in the power of modern owners. Should an Englishman torture dumb animals, the law would not recognize in possession the right to inflict agony; but if a Roman master chose to inflict any imaginable torture on his slave there was no law to interfere, the slave was his property, and he might do what he liked with his own. It is true Emperors, like Titus, had sometimes legislated on the behalf of these unhappy beings, but such legislation rarely survived their own days.

Yet there *were* Roman masters who felt that their slaves were fellow beings, and acted under the impulse of the feeling, and in these cases the devotion of the slaves was excessive, whole households having perished under the torture rather than betray their lord. Such a master was Cornelius.

The young slave, Eteocles, who now stood at the door of his master, soon received the summons to enter. It was a beautiful chamber: the softest carpet covered the floor, the couch was of carved ivory, the coverlet of Tyrian purple, while the mattress and the pillow were of variegated tapestry stuffed with the softest wool. The window was covered with a thick curtain which excluded the light; Eteocles threw it back and admitted the rays of the morning sun upon his master.

"How early you have called me," said Æmilius; "I am sure it isn't daybreak yet."

"The sun is up," said Eteocles with a smile, for the fact must have been evident to Æmilius, who was at that moment half blinded by the sudden rays.

"Then do let the curtain down, or I shall be blinded," he replied.

"You told me," said the slave, "to call you early that you might go out on an excursion with Eucrates."

"Yes, I remember," said Æmilius; "get my pony ready to start within an hour; bring me my *pœnula* and new tunic. Eucrates said that he should be here by the second hour."

There was nothing beyond the mere accident of dress to distinguish the master and the slave; for it was one of the aggravating features in Roman slavery that the gentleman and scholar might by the chances of war become the property of some master, ignorant, unrefined, and brutal, it may be. Modern African slavery has seldom produced this result, which was the peculiar aggravation of Roman slavery.

And the slave of Æmilius was, like him, of gentle birth and liberal education. This had influenced Cornelius in purchasing him from the slave dealers, at an enormous price, for his son; and Eteocles had not found a cruel master, yet how galling at the best such slavery must have been.

When the *clepsydra*, or water clock, indicated the second hour, Æmilius, having finished his morning meal of wine and toasted bread dipped therein, appeared on the terrace in front of the house, where he waited somewhat impatiently for Eteocles, who soon appeared.

"Eteocles," said Æmilius, as he saw him approach with the pony, "have you seen Eucrates yet?"

"He is crossing the park at this moment, and will soon arrive," was the reply.

"A fine morning for our excursion, Æmilius," said Eucrates, as he gained the terrace. "I told *that* Juba to meet me here with my pony; if he does not make haste he will get a few stripes for his reward; I wish I had a slave like yours, he is always ready. What is your mode of securing punctuality?"

"One I fear you would not follow," replied his cousin. "Eteocles, I shall not want you again; you may have the day for your own."

At that moment Juba, the slave of Eucrates, appeared with the pony. There could hardly be imagined a greater contrast than the African in question presented to Eteocles; he was very dark, and possessed all the characteristic features of the Mauritanian race, yet his black eyes sparkled with intelligence, and he would not have appeared an unworthy descendant of those warlike princes whose name he bore.

"What have you been so long about?" said Eucrates fiercely. "And now you haven't combed him down, and he is filthy with mud; what do you mean by it, you African idiot?"

"I couldn't catch him in time to clean him properly," replied Juba; "he was loose."

"Then take more care in future to be punctual; *there*, take *that* for your reward; and now go and work in the mill all day."

As he spoke he laid his whip furiously about his unfortunate slave, and then turned to follow Æmilius, who, tired of this scene, was riding forward.

Juba and Eteocles were left together, and the two slaves did not stir till their masters were out of sight;

when they had disappeared Juba turned to his companion.

"I say, *you* Eteocles, does your master serve you like this?"

"No," was the reply.

"I knew he didn't," said Juba passionately; "it isn't everyone who has such a tyrant as mine; but does he never beat you?"

"Very seldom."

"And when he does,—"

"It cannot be helped, Juba; we must bear our lot."

"Who made it our lot? why, are not we as good as they? my ancestors were kings—men better than his fathers, and here am I, their descendant, the sport of *this—this—*"

"Do not talk like this, Juba; do not think I am not sorry for you, but we must try to bear it; only think what would happen if you were heard; remember he may do what he likes with you."

"Well, and if he did send me to the beasts it would be the sooner over; he loves to torture me now, and I know when I am *quite* his own, and his mother is dead, he is sure to send me to them if I am still alive and he hasn't killed me by inches. Eteocles, were you never free?"

"Do not speak of that," cried the young Greek, in a voice which betrayed some emotion.

"I *will* speak of it; I want to arouse the man in you; will you not even think of the chance of liberty?"

"There is no chance, Juba, none, even were my master as cruel as yours."

The conversation was interrupted; a slave approached, and warned Juba to hasten home, where

he had to spend the day in the *pistrinum*, in which corn was ground by machinery kept in motion by slaves. There was no help for it, and poor Juba slowly retired.

Eteocles accompanied him some little distance towards the villa of his master, which was only a mile or two from that of Cornelius, and was situated on the southern outskirts of the forest near the Orontes. On the road the young Greek strove to console his fellow slave, and to guard him against any ill-judged rebellion to his master's will, which would only lead to the most disastrous consequences, while an attempt to escape would probably end in consignment to the amphitheatre; he spoke with great kindness, and Juba promised to try to be patient and to hope for happier days.

Meanwhile Æmilius and Eucrates had advanced some distance on their journey. They had long made up their minds to visit a spur of the range of mountains to the north-east, near which the great road to the desert passed, from whence a magnificent view could be obtained. Their course lay at first through the thick woods, which fringed the mountain slopes above the Orontes. A military road led through these forests, which were the haunts of many ravenous beasts, which lay hid in their solitude during the day and only came forth by night.

The topic of conversation which most interested the boys was naturally the sports of the preceding day in the amphitheatre, and there was some difference of opinion between them on the subject of Fidenatus.

"Whatever he was," said Æmilius, "he was not a coward; see how fearlessly he gazed on that terrific beast."

"Oh, but that was all magic; these Christians anoint themselves with the fat of infants offered in sacrifice to their God, and that gives them such strange fearlessness."

"A very insufficient means I should have supposed to produce such an effect; besides, you and I knew Fidenatus, there was nothing of the infant-slayer about him."

"Well, he is gone, and serve him right for choosing such a faith. I do not think I should have saved him if I could."

"Let us talk of something else," said Æmilius, anxious to change the subject, for he had been more deeply moved by the closing scene of the previous day than he cared to confess.

So in desultory conversation they wore away the day. They had been ascending for a long time, and, looking forward, they discovered the termination of the forest, and a huge gap which seemed to open on mid-air was before them.

A tremendous precipice here bounded the road on the southern side; far beneath were huge trees waving their branches on the currents of air from the valley of the Orontes; but the brain grew dizzy in contemplating the bare face of the rock which for a thousand perpendicular feet lay beneath them.

But it was the marvellous view which arrested the attention. Beneath, the valley of the Orontes, with its glittering stream, made its great bend towards the south, and as far as the eye could reach they traced its course by the mass of verdure which clothed its banks. But towards the east was the scene which chiefly attracted their observation. The undulating hills of Syria, with their clothing of wood, ceased abruptly a few miles beyond them, and far as the

gaze could penetrate was one unbroken desert,—a very sea of dark brown sand.

The boys gazed for some time in silence; then Æmilius spoke.

"And what lies beyond, Eucrates?"

"Why the regions which Alexander penetrated and conquered, but which no Roman presses with his foot unless as a slave."

This was a sore subject with the boys, for Æmilius was a thorough Roman, and resented the least imputation cast upon his conquering race, while Eucrates, like most Greeks, writhed under the supremacy of the Roman eagle.

"The Romans," said Æmilius, "can afford to laugh at the idle boasts of lying historians, when they hold in subjection the descendants of that very Alexander."

"Whom they have conquered by fraud and treachery."

"No, by their resistless swords."

"Much as they conquered the Gauls at the Allia, or Hannibal at Cannæ, I suppose?"

"No, rather as they conquered Pyrrhus at Beneventum, Philip at Cynoscephalæ, or Perseus at Pydna."

"It is a lie; you only conquered by fraud and treachery. How did you serve the Samnites at the Caudine Forks? You Romans have always been foxes in the skins of lions."

"And you Greeks, what pitiful cowards you must be to let the foxes rule over you. Who holds Athens, Corinth, Sparta, nay, Antioch, in subjection?"

"We do not acknowledge your supremacy."

"What does it matter what you acknowledge, when you are too cowardly to resist it?"

Eucrates turned pale, then red. Yielding to the impulse of passion, he seized a great stone which lay by him and hurled it violently at his cousin; it grazed his head; Æmilius rose up instantly; Eucrates made an attempt to grasp the hunting knife in his girdle, but Æmilius seized his arm almost dislocating it; the knife dropped, and the young Greek rolled backwards, while the other threw the knife scornfully over the precipice. Eucrates rose slowly, did not speak, cast a look of hatred at his cousin, mounted his pony, and rode home alone.

Æmilius waited till the last sounds which marked his retreat had ceased to be audible, then said musingly, "What a cowardly trick; still I am sorry I provoked him so much; but he is always going on about that Alexander. Poor Juba will have to smart for it. I suppose I must return alone." And he rode homewards slowly so as not to overtake his cousin, and nightfall was on him as he entered the woods on the bank of the Orontes. Avoiding the stony track of the main road, he bent his course along the grassy glades, which promised a pleasanter and shorter road through the forest, trusting to his general knowledge of the country. But in some manner he lost his way, and, pausing where two or three glades met, knew not which route to choose. While thus pausing in indecision, his pony started, gave a great plunge, and almost unseated him; he turned and saw the fiery eyes of a wolf glaring upon him from the underwood. His pony galloped madly forward, whether in the right direction or not he did not know, but, looking back, the fiery eyes seemed to have multiplied, and a loud howling announced that a pack of wolves were on his track. How he kept his seat he never could tell; now amidst under-

wood, now in contact with light branches of trees, now ascending, now descending, until suddenly a light appeared before him, and he threw himself from his horse before the door of a house, from the window of which the light was streaming. His horse dashed away into the woods ; the pack burst through the underwood ; he strove madly to open the door, it yielded, and he was received into the arms of a venerable old man, while the ferocious beasts pursued the pony. When he recovered his senses (for he had fainted) he was reclining on a couch ; his host sat by his side bathing his heated brow, and watching him with kind attention, while at the foot of the couch stood his slave Eteocles.

The surprise of Æmilius was equalled by his joy. He was then safe, not in doubtful hands.

"Where are we ?" he enquired. "How came you here ?"

"I have acquaintances in the household," replied his slave ; "we are not far from home,—only an hour's walk through the woods."

"But are the woods safe ? I have had such an escape."

"There is no danger if we take torches ; the wolves are quite gone, they seldom approach so near the clearings, and some of the slaves will accompany us if you wish it."

"Let them come," said Æmilius ; "and do let us make haste, it is getting late, and they will be anxious about me."

And within an hour they entered the villa of Cornelius in safety.

CHAPTER III.

THE CILICIAN PIRATES. EARLY CHRISTIANITY.

SOME few weeks had passed since the events recorded in the preceding chapter, and had produced nothing worthy of record.

Æmilius and Eucrates were again friends, for the latter worthy, knowing his own interests, had speedily made some kind of apology for an outbreak of temper which might have produced serious results: whereupon Æmilius immediately professed that he had been chiefly to blame, and so the matter ended. Indeed it was greatly to the advantage of Eucrates to be on good terms with Æmilius. Losses in commerce had clouded the declining days of his deceased father, and the establishment of his mother was partly supported by the beneficence of the wealthy Cornelius. Still, there was little affection between the youths, so different were their dispositions.

One bright morning in October, Æmilius was pursuing his studies in the library of his father's villa; around him, in presses of cedar wood placed against the walls, were the works of the great historians and poets of Rome and Greece, written on rolls of parchment, or the Egyptian papyrus, each roll being labelled in bright red letters, with the title of the book and

the name of the author. Portraits of the most distinguished writers ornamented the room, while busts of Homer, Thucydides, and Demosthenes, confronting Virgil, Livy, and Cicero, surmounted the presses.

But Æmilius was applying himself to the problems of Euclid, then, as now, part of a liberal education, and was striving in vain to thread the maze of lines and angles presented on the diagram. His tutor was absent, and he was about to throw the task aside in disgust, when a light knock was heard at the door, and, in answer to the summons to enter, Eteocles appeared.

"I am bothered to death with this stupid Euclid," said his master; "I wish he had never lived; to think of their erecting a statue to him amongst those of great men in the Forum! I shall fling a stone at it the first time I see it."

"May I help you?" asked his slave.

Æmilius looked surprised.

"Certainly," he said, "if you know anything about it, I shall only be too glad."

Eteocles looked at the diagram; his early education had rendered him familiar with the subject, and he explained the difficulties so clearly that Æmilius was astonished.

"You must come and help me," he said, "whenever Eudaimon gives me such work to do. And now I will tell you why I sent for you: I am going to ride with my father to the sea-coast; we shall stay at the villa of Manlius and return to-morrow, and you must accompany us; we shall start in about an hour; go and see that our ponies are ready, give them some corn, 'tis a long ride."

Eteocles departed to fulfil his master's orders, and at the close of the hour the little party set out, Æmilius

riding in front with his father, while Eteocles followed in the rear.

In a few hours they drew near the coast to the north of the Orontes. As they surmounted the last hill a glorious view lay before them,—the whole sea coast from the headland which terminated the range of Pierius on the north, to the promontories of the rocky headlands on the south of the stream; white sails studded the mighty deep imparting life and animation to the scene, while Seleucia, the seaport of Antioch, with its docks crowded with shipping, its breakwater, and splendid harbour, lay in full view on the left hand.

Cornelius stopped at the entrance to the grounds of his friend, which were about a mile from the shore, while Æmilius and Eteocles rode on to enjoy a gallop on the sands, promising to return within an hour or two. But when they arrived at the entrance to the deep gorge, which descended to the beach, they found it quite impracticable for their horses, so Æmilius told Eteocles to take the animals to the villa, and then to rejoin him on the shore.

Left alone, Æmilius commenced the descent on foot; his way led over rocks, through thickets of underwood and prickly shrubs, beneath the branches of pines, until at last he gained the shore, when his attention was at once attracted by the sight of a vessel at anchor in the secluded little bay at the foot of the gorge; boats were lying idle upon the shore but no men were in sight. A favourite dog, which had followed him from home, was his only attendant as he walked musingly along.

Suddenly five or six men issued from a recess in the rocks, which he had passed without noticing; they were clad in a foreign garb. Seeing the boy

they paused, and conferred hastily with each other; then the whole party followed in his track. He heard the sound of footsteps, turned, and beheld these suspicious-looking strangers. The foremost, advancing, tried to lay his hand upon him, an indignity the proud Roman boy instantly repelled, while the dog, taking more decided action, sprang upon the fellow and seized him by the throat. A spear was immediately darted at the poor dog, which fell pierced by the keen blade, while two of the men, seizing the arms of Æmilius, led him forcibly forward towards the boats.

"Leave me alone," said the unfortunate boy, "I am the son of a Roman citizen; by what right do you meddle with me?"

"By the right of the strongest," said the leader of the party; "the only right your countrymen ever observe; and now, mark my words, if you utter another cry, you shall share the fate of your dog, otherwise I promise you your life."

He spoke with a strong provincial accent, and Æmilius saw that he had fallen into the hands of Cilician pirates, on the look out for plunder or for captives whom they might sell into slavery.

It is needless to paint the bitterness of despair which fell upon him at the thought of home, of his father, and of his fond mother, from whom he was now ruthlessly torn; his only hope seemed to be in Eteocles, who would too probably only share his fate if he attempted to follow. His captors were, however, in no hurry to reach their ship; they bound their captive hand and foot: placed him in the bottom of a boat where he could only see the sky above him: and resumed their task of taking in water from a spring amongst the rocks.

We must now return to Eteocles. He had accomplished his task, and was on the point of entering the gorge to descend and join his master, when he was startled by a dark object moving amongst the brushwood, and recognised the poor dog emerging slowly from the cover; fearing something was wrong, he hastened to meet it, and then beheld the wound in its side. The faithful animal could move no longer; it licked the hand of the slave; strove to turn its head backwards towards the spot where it had left its captive master, and died.

What, then, had become of Æmilius?

Eteocles, who dearly loved his young lord, was seized by painful anxiety. Without, however, losing his strong common sense,—a most valuable quality under such circumstances,—he followed the track the blood of the poor dog had made, until he saw the shore through an opening in the bushes, the ship at anchor, and the boat, into the interior of which his sight could not penetrate.

It would have been madness to proceed further alone, and he ran with all the speed he could command towards the villa of Manlius, to alarm Cornelius and to bring aid.

There were always slaves capable of bearing arms about a Roman villa such as that of Manlius, and, in the present instance, nearly thirty men started with Cornelius to rescue his son and chastise the daring Cilicians.

They reached the glen, and commenced the descent, but in the meantime the pirates had been reinforced from the ship, and, learning from scouts the advance of the little party, they took the initiative, and saluted Cornelius and his party with a shower of darts and arrows from an ambush in the glen.

Cornelius was an old soldier, and stood his ground manfully, until he received a severe wound, and was dragged forcibly from the scene by his friend Manlius, who represented to him in vigorous language that by remaining he was throwing away the last chance of rescuing his boy. So they retreated, pursued to the very summit by the pirates, and, reaching the villa, sent expresses to Antioch for reinforcements, and to Seleucia, the naval station near the mouth of the Orontes, for a galley to intercept the pirates.

Æmilius heard the sounds of the conflict with intense agitation, and when they died away, as his friends retreated, his last hope seemed to have faded, and he yielded to unrestrained grief.

Another hour passed, the sun set, and twilight deepened upon the waters; the Cilicians had made a fire upon the coast, and were evidently working hard to hasten their departure.

All at once Æmilius felt that the boat was being pushed from the sand in which its prow was imbedded into the open water; the motion quickened; he felt a shadow pass over him, then the warm breath of one who spoke into his ear.

"Hush! keep silence; you may yet be saved."

It was Eteocles.

A thick fog was happily rising from the water, and hid the boat from the pirates, who were busily engaged in loading their other boats with water casks filled from the spring. The boat glided out into the open water, as Eteocles sprang noiselessly into it; no sound arose to cause apprehension, and he cut the bonds which bound his master, who would have embraced him in his gratitude, but was checked by the words—

"Be very silent, we are not safe yet."

Æmilius began to rub his stiffened limbs, and to strive to restore the circulation; it was some time before either hands or feet seemed at ease. Meanwhile Eteocles was using the oars with great caution, and they were gliding out to sea. In the thick fog they could only see a few yards around them, and had soon lost sight even of the fire, when a loud cry warned them that their flight was discovered, and they soon heard the sounds of pursuit, and the eager voices of pursuers. But the fog, and the fog alone, saved them; their pursuers passed within a few yards of them without perceiving them. Once they thought they saw the lights marking the position of the ship, but they soon disappeared. They were unable to use their oars, for fear of indicating their position by the sound; the wind blew from the land, and they drifted before it; they said very little, and concentrated all their faculties on the sense of hearing, by which alone they could detect the proximity of their foes. The night was very calm, and the cries of the Cilicians still reached their ears. At last every sound died away, but they knew not which way to stir; they had no means of telling north from south, or east from west, for the heavens were completely obscured by the mist; so they could only wait anxiously the light of dawn.

Morning came at last, but it was long before the sun broke through the fog; the boys gazed anxiously as the mist cleared away, and each moment increased the extent of their vision, but, as the circle widened and widened, there was no change in their horizon,—it was still the sea, the sea. And now they could but acknowledge, even against their will, that it was not the mist which hid the land from them, but that they were lost at sea, uncertain where to steer for the land,

at the mercy of wind and waves, not knowing whether they should ever see land again.

Æmilius had tasted nothing since the noon of the preceding day. Eteocles had a roll of bread and nothing else; he gave this to his master, who at first refused to accept it, but, being pressed by Eteocles, divided it equally in silence, then turned and hid his face to hide his emotion; he seemed but to have escaped one danger to fall into another; hungry and thirsty, his courage gave way, and he wept.

There was a great difference in the behaviour of the two boys; Eteocles seemed gifted with wondrous resignation; sometimes his hands were earnestly clasped, sometimes his lips moved as if communing with an unseen Being, but there were no signs of impatience, no murmurs against his fate.

Æmilius at last looked up suddenly, and, noticing the composed face of his slave, exclaimed, "What can possess you, Eteocles, you do not seem to feel our danger? Do you know we have neither food nor water? Does not this blazing sun scorch you and parch your throat as it does mine?"

"Yes," said Eteocles, "but I can bear it; it is the path by which One Who ordereth all things for the best has willed that I should come to Him; Fidenatus had a harder path."

Æmilius started, looked fixedly at his slave, and then exclaimed:

"Oh! I know all now; Eteocles you are a Christian!"

"I am," was the brief reply.

His master did not reply again for some few minutes, but appeared absorbed in thought. At last, as if summoning up all his energies, he exclaimed:

"Eteocles, what is Christianity? What is this

strange faith which seems to take the sting from death, and to give supernatural courage, such as I witnessed in Fidenatus, and now witness again in you; tell me, what is the secret?"

It was with deep interest that Æmilius put this question, not in a spirit of idle curiosity; the circumstances which surrounded him were too critical, his position between life and death too solemn for trifling.

Eteocles heard the question with joy; he was silent for one moment, during which he most earnestly implored the aid of the Holy Spirit, and then he told of that Lord in Whom he believed.

Christianity has been preached by the followers of the Crucified under circumstances of every conceivable character,—in the recesses of dungeons to dying captives, as well as beneath the vaulted roofs of cathedrals, beside altars fragrant with the breath of incense.

And now once more the story of that dying Love, whereby the Lord conquered death, was told in that open boat, beneath the vault of a Syrian sky, and told with such power that the speaker forgot he was a slave, and seemed transformed by his very story; so that from one more soul redeemed by the Precious Blood the cry arose before the mercy-seat,—What must I do to be saved? For in that moment of supreme distress, the emptiness of the faith—if it can be so called—in which he had been educated was more than apparent to Æmilius; before him was the unknown future, that future of which Horace wrote so despairingly, and the only guide through whom he could penetrate its mysteries was his slave, and their relative positions seemed changed.

This was the secret of the rapid advance of Chris-

tianity: it gave certainty in the place of uncertainty; it showed the way to a life beyond the cypress and funereal urn; it gratified the craving of the immortal soul, which felt it could not perish with the frail dust of the physical frame, and thus life and immortality, brought to light by the Gospel, conquered the world.

And death—that leap in the dark, as the heathen might justly call it,—seemed to lie before these boys, who now discussed with thrilling interest the great problem of the future. In the south-west, as the sun drew near its setting, dark clouds appeared; between their outlines the sky was intensely bright; openings and rents seemed to reveal a land of living fire beyond ever changing its hues as the mysterious cloud-land varied its forms, now veiling the bright sunset, and now forming fissures through which it glowed with intense splendour. Around them the sea was perfectly still, not a ripple broke the monotony of the surface; but, as the sun set and the splendour faded, there was a hollow moaning upon the waves, which told that convulsions were about to rend the surface.

Eteocles was the first to notice these signs; the sea had been familiar to him from boyhood, and he spoke in earnest tones:

"I fear we are in great danger."

"Yes, indeed," said Æmilius; "I have hardly voice or strength left, and pain consumes me."

"It will not be left to hunger or thirst; look at those clouds; now listen, do you not hear that distant sound, now of moaning, now of seething waters? a storm is at hand."

"Will the Lord Who died for His own receive me? will He receive *me* wicked as I have been?"

"He is able to save to the uttermost; let us cry to Him."

And they knelt in the boat and called upon Him Who is mighty to save, while in the distance the outline of the waves was marked with white foam which drew nearer, while the boiling of the surge caused a hissing sound to ascend. Nearer and nearer it drew, and the boys rose from their knees. Eteocles seized the helm, and turned the stern to the advancing waves; the wind rushed over them, and the boat was tossed amidst the foam; a hundred times they seemed on the point of being engulfed in the waves, but God preserved them; the whirlwind passed over, the waves subsided, and the boat floated placidly on the still surface of the deep.

The moon now set, seeming to sink into the waves, casting a track of fiery light upon the water, which looked like a path of glory to that heavenly home towards which the ardent imaginations of the boys were directed, when suddenly lines appeared, traced upon the glowing orb as if by a pencil.

"Look," said Eteocles, "a ship."

"The pirate perhaps."

"No, it is from the opposite direction, and may cross our path."

When at last all was dark save the glimmering starlight, the boys waited with the utmost anxiety,—life with its aspirations was again roused within them.

At last Æmilius raised a joyful shout.

"It is coming," he said.

The huge dark mass became visible in the gloom; the boys raised their voices; they shouted for aid in tones stronger than a minute or two before they would have thought they possessed. The vessel drifted down upon them; again they shouted; their cries were heard; eager faces crowded the deck;

ropes were thrown over; torches held over the side, and in a few minutes the Cilician boat was deserted, and Æmilius and Eteocles stood on the deck.

It was a vessel bound from the Piræus to Antioch, and they were saved.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FUGITIVE SLAVES.

THE news of the capture of Æmilius by the pirates, and of the dangerous wound of Cornelius, reached Eucrates and his mother early on the following morning, and greatly excited them. Melissa at once made preparations to go to the villa and comfort her sorrowing sister, and Eucrates started off in such a hurry that he actually forgot to leave orders concerning Juba, whom he generally managed to torment whether present or absent.

In the case of Æmilius and Eteocles, the better side of Roman slavery, an aspect, alas, it seldom wore, has been presented to the reader; in the case of Eucrates and Juba the more common and the worse aspect.

Poor Juba's life was one of unmitigated suffering; from the very love of cruelty his master was never weary of contriving mental and physical tortures for his unhappy slave, and he had thereby nourished a deadly hatred, concerning which he never troubled himself.

But he had gone away on the morning in question and there was no probability of his return

for several hours. When he had gone, Juba left the villa, thereby incurring the chance of most severe punishment, watched his master from a neighbouring eminence, and then took his path into the woods.

In spite of his degraded position, determined courage and firm resolution were the characteristics of this unhappy slave: his fathers had been indeed monarchs in Mauritania, and had commanded legions wild as those Numidians, who won Cannæ for Hannibal, and in turn sealed his fate at Zama. And now he entered the woods with the half-formed resolution of trying to escape, and of leading the life of a savage in their recesses; or of seeking to join some of the gangs of banditti who were supposed to lurk in their solitudes, and to consist chiefly of slaves who had deserted their masters. He lingered with undecided steps, hardly knowing what to do, but knowing one thing, that if he tried to escape and failed, his fate would be a cruel one. Yet so desperate was he, and so keen the smart of undeserved blows, that the temptation was constantly before him to way-lay his master, kill him if possible, and to take his chance in the forests. Happily, Eucrates was now far away, and, wearied with his ramble, towards mid-day, Juba threw himself down beneath a tree, and, soothed by the pleasant shade, in spite of his troubles fell fast asleep.

While he was lying there, a stranger came along, a man of bronzed countenance and ferocious aspect, who paused when he saw the boy, gazed at him, marked the rents in his linen tunic where the stripes had cut, and marked also that capacious forehead where even a tyro in physiology could read savage

determination and resolute courage. The stranger himself was a man, whom a peaceable traveller would hardly care to meet on a lonely road; scars on his brow and cheeks testified his familiarity with mortal strife, while a sword dependent from his side, a hunting knife in his girdle, and a bow and quiver completed his equipments.

"I should think he would answer our purpose," he muttered, and touching the sleeping Juba lightly he aroused him.

The slave started, then gazed, not without some apprehension, at the stranger.

"Have you travelled far, boy, that you sleep thus soundly, or has your master given you a holiday? I see by the rents in your tunic that you have a gentle lord."

The contraction in the African's features, and the look of hatred which accompanied it, sufficiently answered the stranger's purpose, and solved his doubts if he had any.

"Nay," he said, "you need not fear me, I am a friend to the oppressed, in proof of which, you are welcome to share my mid-day meal, if you like."

Sitting down by Juba, he produced from his wallet sundry savoury edibles, and offered a share to the slave, who, being very hungry, did not need much pressing.

"So you have a kind lord?" he said, when hunger was a little appeased.

"I am sure you can see that I have *not;* you have given me food, but that does not give you the right to mock me."

"Quite right, boy, I like to see spirit in a lad. Who is your master?"

"Eucrates, the son of Sophron."

"Oh! I have heard of him, and from my heart, if you will believe me, pity you. I should say he was fattening you for the beasts, only there is little spare flesh on your bones; depend upon it, it will be the natural death of most of his slaves, unless they anticipate him and save themselves."

"How are they to do it?"

"If you met one who offered you the means of liberty and revenge, what would you give in return?"

Here Juba could restrain himself no longer, and forgetting prudence, exclaimed fiercely, "All that I have; my life itself."

"I thought so," said the stranger; "and now boy, since you have spoken plainly, I will too; I can put all this in your power, can you guess who I am?"

"Yes: one of the banditti who are said to inhabit the forest; but I must have more proof than mere words, ere I put my life in your hands."

"And you shall have it; look at this sword, yet wet with the blood of tyrants; look at this gold," and he shewed a handful of coin, "it is the plunder of the plunderers; and now listen;" he drew a horn from his girdle, blew some peculiar notes; a minute had hardly passed ere they were answered by mysterious echoes.

"I will trust you," said Juba; "may I go with you now?"

"Not yet, you will have to earn your admittance into the band of freemen, while you gratify your revenge at the same moment."

"But how? When?"

"Stop—not so fast; before we trust you, you will

have to be initiated into our mysteries, to take the oath which binds you, under supernatural penalties, to us, and us to you."

"Lead on, I am ready."

"The hour is not yet come; can you get abroad at night?"

"It is difficult but not impossible, our old porter sleeps soundly when he hasn't a cough."

"Try your best to come to us to-night, or, failing that, to-morrow night."

"How am I to find you?"

"Do you know the pine on the hill above us, which was struck by lightning during the last storm?"

"I do."

"When the moon of to-morrow night is an hour old, which will be near midnight, be at that pine alone. You do not fear the woods?"

"I fear nothing if I can but escape slavery."

"You will find there a man to conduct you to your future comrades; he will ask you 'How old is the moon?' you must reply, 'Old enough to light men to liberty;' it will be your passport to the freedom you seek."

"And meanwhile?"

"Meanwhile, bear all things; let your master be cruel if he will, your turn will come next; be calm, brave, and patient, 'twill be but the calm before the storm. Now we must part for the present; stay here, do not attempt to trace my path."

The stranger rose up, and leaving Juba a prey to conflicting emotions, disappeared beneath the lofty columns of the pines.

Juba rose, and returned home, a very different boy in his hopes and aspirations from the despair-

ing youth who had left that prison house, yet he felt the burden of a secret which, discovered, would consign him to the beasts; but the deadly hatred with which the cruelty of Eucrates had inspired him made him dare all. He was not naturally of a cruel disposition; he would have yielded completely to the influence of affection, but such affection he had never known since he was torn from his home in early childhood by the fortune of war. The only softening influence he felt was the remembrance of his mother, but he had lost her for ever, and knew not whether she were alive or dead; he only knew that her captors had sold her into slavery, that was all. But all the good in him had been crushed out by the fearful servitude under which he groaned, and only one quality seemed to remain unchanged,—his indomitable fortitude under pain; this it was that stung Eucrates, and increased his hatred to his unfortunate slave.

He did not sleep that night; his nightly couch was a little straw in the worst of the cells allotted to the slaves: there was no exit from this part of the villa save through a gate locked at an early hour; the windows were barred, and the only chance of escape was through the great door opening from the atrium, the keys of which were always placed under the pillow of the old porter who slept in a cell adjoining the doorway.

The young African stood at the window nearest his cell, watching the woods in the east dimly visible in the faint starlight; presently a light like that of a rising conflagration flooded the upper branches,—it was the rising moon.

"It is time," said Juba, and he drew a deep breath.

He stole away with naked feet, and ascended the passages leading to the atrium; it was very dark; no sound revealed the presence of life in the building; all slept. Groping his way he reached the cell of the porter, paused, listened, and was gratified by the deep breathing of the Cerberus. The daring boy glided to the bedside, inserted his hand cautiously beneath the pillow, not so cautiously however, but the porter was partially awakened, raised his head, strove to gaze into the darkness, then muttering some incoherent words, sank back, and slept again.

Juba had his hand upon the keys, drew them forth, and glided like a serpent back to the doorway; he knew the lock well, and was soon at liberty, leaving the door locked behind him, and bearing the keys with him; he knew his danger should anything call the porter to the door during his absence, but he had made up his mind to dare all.

Groping through the underwood, now startling some wild animal in its lair, now startled himself by the distant cry of some beast of prey, he persevered till he reached the blasted pine.

There in its shade stood a form which moved as he approached while he heard the words, "How old is the moon?"

"Old enough to light men to liberty," he replied.

"Then follow me and I will guide you to the liberty which you seek."

Juba followed. They plunged into the depths of the forest; through dense underwood, sometimes impeded by rocks, sometimes fording foaming torrents from the mountain above, until through the trunks of the trees a faint light appeared,

which seemed to arise from beneath the ground and to illuminate the lower branches of some giant oaks which grew above.

They drew nearer, and were challenged by a sentinel; the guide gave the password and they continued their course until they arrived at the edge of a natural basin or deep hollow in the ground, surrounded by precipitous rocks, whose summits were clothed by bushes and prickly shrubs.

The area beneath was about thirty yards across, and almost circular in outline, and when Juba gazed into it a singular scene presented itself, such as an artist would delight to transfer to canvass.

In the centre of the space was a large fire, the light from which had produced the illumination observed by the slave; around it lay from twenty to thirty men clothed in tattered costumes of different fashions, and reclining in various postures, as they watched the cauldron, which, suspended over the fire, emitted savoury odours. Around them deadly weapons were profusely scattered, nor were any precautions necessary for their safety neglected, for Juba observed two or three sentinels posted at regular distances from the brink of the chasm, into which they now descended by a flight of steps hewn irregularly from the living rock.

Standing by the fire, gazing into the cauldron, was the individual Juba had before met; he turned as he heard their approaching footsteps, and extended his hand to the slave; still grasping the right hand, he turned to the members of the band.

"Brethren of the woods," he said, "behold the youth of whom I spoke."

"He is welcome," was the general reply.

In the brawny limbs and bronzed complexions

of the men around him were the evidences of a life of endurance and toil; but there was that on their features which simple toil and danger never could produce,—ferocity and recklessness, the fruits of cruel oppression, so cruel that these men could only be free at the price of proclaiming war against society at large, and it needed little sagacity to read the evidences of the utter ruthlessness of the strife.

Little was said until the contents of the cauldron were set before the band. Venison of the forest, beef and mutton of the clearings, alike contributed to the support of the banditti, who seemed in small fear of famine; wine of the choicest vintage, the result of some successful forage, washed down the viands.

When hunger was thus appeased, and the majority of the band were composing themselves to sleep, their captain, beckoning a few who appeared to be the veterans of the party, told Juba to follow, and led the way out of the hollow. They traversed a narrow path in the thick bushes for a few yards, when they arrived on the brink of a deep defile or chasm; above them rose the precipitous sides of the mountain, which had been cleft in two, as it appeared, by some convulsion of nature, forming this defile issuing from its womb. They stood on the verge of the abyss; below them they heard the foaming waters of a stream which found its bed far beneath; beyond them the chasm penetrated the mighty hill, clothed with dark pines and shrubs which found a precarious lodgment on its sides. Their progress seemed at an end, when the captain, seizing the branches of a tree which grew at the extremity of the defile, where it issued from the mountain, swung himself to a ledge of rock, in-

visible to those he had quitted; man after man seized the pliant branches, which resembled those of the willow, and followed; whatever Juba may have felt he did not hesitate, he swung like the others over the abyss, and, assisted by friendly arms, stood again on firm ground. And now, by the pale moonlight, he perceived a path, just broad enough for a man to tread, leading along the brink of the defile towards the centre of the mountain; they followed it for a few hundred yards, when the mouth of a cavern appeared, from which a lurid light glared across their path. They paused until a deep voice from within cried "enter."

Well might Juba's nerves quiver as he did so in company with the rest. It was a vault hewn by nature in the solid rock, in the centre of which burned a fire lighting up the dimness of the cavern so as to leave portions in deep mysterious darkness, across which rays of light shot as the flames leaped up from the fire in the midst, and revealed the strange ornaments of this dreary abode. In a recess a skeleton was disclosed by the quivering rays, while strange figures were pictured on the walls, with cabalistic signs, fearful, from their very want of meaning, to all eyes but those of the initiated, and uncouth instruments, destined for unknown uses, lay scattered around.

On a couch, made of fern leaves strewn upon a wooden framework, reclined an aged woman, whose appearance was commanding and majestic; of tall stature and strongly-marked features, she looked the very personification of Hecate. Her garments were of simple white linen, confined around her waist by a girdle, upon which again cabalistic signs were wrought; her hair floated at

will; it was almost of such length as to extend to her waist.

"Behold, mother," said the captain, "the youth whom the gods have sent."

She arose, approached Juba, looked keenly into his face, put back the hair from his brow, and gazed until he shrank from that piercing glance.

"Yes," she said, "it is he of whom the gods have given me visions; for whom great deeds are reserved, if he has the heart to dare and the hand to execute. Son of a race of kings, canst thou be a slave?"

"No, mother," said Juba, "no longer."

"The path to freedom lies through toil and danger."

"Slavery is worse to me than death."

"What dost thou seek of the gods?"

"Liberty and revenge."

"They will give thee these, and more than thou wouldest dare to ask them."

"But how dost thou know, mother; canst thou gaze into the future?"

"Thou shalt be satisfied; follow."

She led the way to the extremity of the cavern, where a curtain veiled a deep recess; she threw the curtain back; a brazier containing hot coals stood immediately within; on these she cast incense, and clouds of aromatic smoke arose, while she muttered incantations with marvellous rapidity, her excitement increasing each moment, until her frame shook and trembled beneath the emotion.

By degrees, as Juba gazed, a pale light arose and gradually filled the inner cavern, revealing an uncouth image in the opposite extremity, and illumin-

ing a pool of water in the centre, until its surface glowed like a mirror.

A low deep voice from beneath the earth seemed to utter words in a tongue unintelligible to Juba, and probably to the others, for, like him, they trembled. The priestess answered in similar words, and sentence and response were interchanged for a brief space, until she faced them.

"Mortals, what seek ye of the infernal deities?" she exclaimed."

"The past—the future," said their leader.

While they gazed, shadows passed over the surface of the water, which gradually arranged themselves after the fashion of a vivid picture, and Juba beheld the home of his early days, the form of his mother moving within it, and, yet more marvellous, he beheld himself as in those days, when he knew a father's care and mother's love, ere that bloody day when the father left to return no more, and the conqueror snatched mother and child into slavery. The tears stood in his eyes, when the shadows lost their form, and all was misty and vague till, upon that bright mirror of water, another picture arranged itself.

Juba gazed in utter incredulity; he saw himself, but in such scenes that he was utterly bewildered; he saw that which promised the fullest satisfaction to his desires, nay, which surpassed them all, but it was a prize he could not hope to grasp, and he panted for breath in his utter excitement.

"Choose," said the priestess, "wilt thou dare to grasp thy fortune?"

"Oh, mother, it cannot be for me!"

"Rash mortal, dare not to distrust the jealous deities who guard this shrine."

"Oh, mother, if I may but attain this, I am yours, yours completely and entirely."

"Then take the oath," she replied.

And she dictated to him the words of a fearful oath, which he repeated after her, wherein he not only swore eternal hatred to Rome and Roman subjects, but invoked utter malediction upon himself if he failed in its fulfilment.

"Brethren of the forest," said the priestess, "do you admit this youth, now dedicated as you have been, into your society?"

"We do admit him, and swear to guard his life as we guard our own."

"Wilt thou, Juba, be obedient to thy captain, faithful to thy brethren, guarding their lives as thou guardest thine own?"

"I will."

"Scatter this incense in the fire and take the oath of allegiance and fidelity, while thou devotest thyself to the service of the infernal gods."

He did so, and as he concluded the last words, once more the solemn sound arose from beneath, and he thought he heard the words, "We accept the victim, we will fulfil the desire."

Darkness ensued, the curtain fell, and, leaving the cavern, they retraced the dangerous path to the hollow, where the banditti slept.

"Young brother," said the captain, when they stood once more upon firm ground, "we must part, but only for a short time; return to your tyrants, and obey them well in all things until your turn come. Can you see from your prison house the pine tree on the hill, where your guide met you to-night?"

"I can."

"When you see a torch flame at midnight from its topmost branches, throw open the doors of your tyrant's halls, and await the avengers."

"Let it be very soon."

"It shall not be long; and now, young brother, farewell."

And Juba returned through the forest; the dawn was already nigh when he reached the door, but he unlocked it, locked it again, replaced the keys in safety, then sought his couch for an hour's sleep.

CHAPTER V.

FIGHTING WITH CONVICTION.

EUCRATES arose on the following morning, quite ignorant of the scene which had taken place during the night in the solitudes of the forest, and prepared to go to the villa of his uncle to learn whether any tidings concerning Æmilius had been received.

Juba got his usual allowance of blows, kicks, and revilings, but a change had come over the African, and his master could not but observe it: in place of that passive look of defiance, which Eucrates could never conquer, was an air of calm submission, which surprised him, while it did not render him the less cruel or exacting. But at last Eucrates started alone for the villa of Cornelius, and soon forgot Juba and all that concerned him. Having no one better to talk to, he talked to himself, and thus he conversed:

"I do hope that those Cilicians have got safely away with my dear cousin; Cornelius would have no son then, and I might marry Cornelia and be heir to all. What a charming villa it is—what grounds—what heaps of slaves! and who knows, with such a start, whether I might not become

legatus, or at least quæstor, and make a name in the world. Perhaps in time these tyrants, these Romans, might be overthrown, and then who knows what might happen; it would be a great treat to be a tyrant like Dionysius, with no one to dispute one's will, or to control one's appetite for games or gladiators. But there is that Eteocles; they say they fear the pirates have got him: nothing of the sort; taken the opportunity to run away,—that's all. I shall propose a hunt in the woods, with dogs; it would be a great treat to catch him in that way."

Whilst indulging in these interesting meditations he reached a turn in the road, from which the villa of Cornelius and the path from Antioch were in full view; his attention was at once attracted by two figures rapidly ascending from the river, and he paused in his walk to gaze at them; they drew nearer, and, to his intense disgust, began to look like Æmilius and Eteocles; he tried to shut out the unwelcome truth, and to disbelieve his eyes, but conjecture rapidly became certainty: they were, indeed, the rescued wanderers, hastening with rapid steps to convey the news of their own deliverance. Bitter although the disappointment was, he saw that he must make the best of it; he ran at full speed down the hill, until he gained the path immediately in front of his cousin and Eteocles.

"Oh, my dear Æmilius," he began, "the gods be praised for this happy meeting! oh, how we have sorrowed for you! I have not slept since you were lost." And he embraced him with such fervency that his cousin was quite embarrassed.

"You must thank Eteocles that you see me again; he, and he only, has saved me."

"I do thank him, indeed, from the bottom of my heart; Eteocles, you must no longer be a slave, but a friend, you who have restored us Æmilius."

"And now," said he, "I must run forward and break the happy news, lest it should be more than they can bear; joy sometimes kills as well as sorrow;" and he started at full speed.

Consequently, when Æmilius arrived upon the terrace, the whole household was issuing forth to meet him; his father hastened, in spite of his wound, to clasp his recovered boy, and, pressing him to his breast, lost all his Roman fortitude; his mother could hardly reach him ere she fainted, when the household slaves, to whom Æmilius was an object of pride and affection, hastened with tearful eyes to fetch water; his sister Cornelia stood by hardly able to speak; the joy of the whole community testified to the worth of their young master, and the affectionate fidelity of the slaves.

Nor was Eteocles long unnoticed: he had witnessed this scene thinking with some sadness that he had no dear friends to welcome him,—no father to clasp him to his bosom, no mother or sister to shed tears over him; affections, long transferred to heaven, through Him Who has taught us not to sorrow as those without hope, revived with startling power; but Æmilius sought him, and, taking him by the hand, presented him to Cornelius saying—

"Father, behold my preserver."

And the stately Roman blessed the slave who had restored him his child.

Eucrates witnessed this scene almost unnoticed, like the serpent in Paradise; the sight of the universal happiness was the source of pain to him; his dreams were ended.

When tranquility was restored, and the family assembled in the peristylium amidst the foliage, Æmilius told the tale of his captivity and deliverance, and was interrupted by the exclamations of his audience every moment, as surprise or joy gained the ascendancy. When he had concluded, Cornelius, first looking around, said—

"And now, how shall we reward Eteocles? But for him we should never have seen you again."

"Father," said Æmilius, "I know he will not wish to leave me, but let him henceforth be my friend, not my slave."

"I had already so designed; once manumitted he will be safe from the chances of fortune, and as soon as possible the necessary formalities shall be completed; meanwhile, the change may take place in his actual although not in his legal position."

For in those days the jealousy of the civil power interposed obstacles, in the shape of legal formalities, to the manumission of a slave, which were not removed till the days of the first Christian emperor.

But there was now one secret which Æmilius could not confide to his parents, the first he had ever had to conceal, and he felt its burden; it concerned hopes and aspirations which had been roused within him at a moment of extreme danger, and now that the peril was over, and the skies bright and clear again, he strove in vain to cast conviction away.

Had he yielded to its influence at once, he would but have satisfied his conscience, but the sacrifice demanded was too great. To embrace a proscribed religion, one whose adherents consisted almost ex-

clusively of the lower class of society; to live in daily danger of torture and death; to bring disgrace upon his friends who loved him so dearly; to be hated, slandered, and proscribed in life; and to finish his course on the arena, amidst the hoots and yells of a populace, who would feast upon his agonies as upon those of one who was an enemy to the whole human race; this was the sacrifice, and he had not the courage to become the victim.

So he drove off the thought of Christianity with all the energy he could command: when alone with Eteocles he avoided the subject; but he could not forget, and often in the silent night the revelation which had been made to his soul came back upon him,—the certainty of death, the emptiness of life, the world beyond the tomb, of which he had caught so vivid a glimpse,—and he could not rest.

He plunged into all the sports and pleasures within his reach; he rode, hunted, or fished with Eucrates; he avoided the society of Eteocles; and sought excitement in Antioch and its gaieties, but all in vain: there was a load on his breast he could not cast away, and his altered demeanour excited the surprise of his friends, who fancied him unwell.

At last, one afternoon, weary of Eucrates, weary of his studies, weary of his games and sports, he wandered alone in the woods, and as he wandered the conflict in his mind became yet more painful; around him nature shone in all her beauty, and the birds sang songs of peace, but there was no peace for him; he could not make up his mind to proceed in the course which his conscience told him he ought to follow; he could not summon courage to forsake father, mother, sister, and home, to give up all the hopes he had nourished concerning his

future years, and to become an outlaw from society; no, he must shake off the thought and be happy.

And if the Hand of God had not been in all this, if Divine Grace had not marked him for its own, he might have shaken it off, and, for a few brief years of pleasure here, have bartered the world to come; but a stronger than he prevented.

Arriving at a mossy bank, he threw himself down and wept.

"Why dost thou weep, boy?" said a calm and deep voice.

He looked up; a man of venerable appearance stood before him, who had evidently been reading in the woods, for a roll of parchment was in his hand.

Æmilius thought he recognized the stranger in whose house he had found refuge from the wolves, yet in his distress his first impulse was to answer hastily; but there was something in the heavenly calm of the stranger's face and voice so dignified, yet so sweet, that he simply replied,—

"I came in the woods that I might be alone. You would not comprehend my sorrow."

"Be not sure of that," was the reply, "it is not the first time I have marked you, my son; you are not happy, yet you possess all riches can give or youth can crave; do these things not give your soul rest?"

"If they did I should not be here now."

"Then you seek a truer and deeper happiness than the world can give, a deeper love than that of parents or friends?"

"I do," said Æmilius, overcome by his emotions.

"And my son there is such a rest, so calm, so sweet, that those who possess it ride in harbour

secure from the storms of this world,—a rest no afflictions can disturb, and which will endure for ever."

"My father," said Æmilius, "tell me more of this rest; I would know more."

"It is in His Love, my dear son, Who has already claimed your heart."

"Do you speak from experience? have *you* felt this Love? have *you* found this Rest? what has it done for you?"

"For *me*? it has saved me from sin and death, it has given me an inheritance which shall endure for ever, it has revealed to me a God and a Friend Who is ever near me, nay, Who dwelleth in me, Who has taken away the sting of death, and promises me that when this frail body is no more, the immortal spirit shall taste joy and rapture no earthly imagination can conceive."

"And wherein does this happiness consist?"

"It is summed up in one glorious Name, the Name of Him, who has already spoken to your soul."

"He has, father, or at least I thought He had, but I have rejected the Grace offered me. I see you are a Christian and know all; I have fought against conviction, and fear I have lost hope for ever; speak, father, is there yet a chance for me? can I be saved?"

"A chance,—hope,—nay, certainty; He has said, 'Whosoever cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out:' think not, my dear son, I have met you here by chance; God Who ordereth all things has sent me to meet you, and to bid you come unto Him."

"Father, listen to me, I will tell you all, but

first answer me this one question,—If the Lord loves His own so much and is yet Almighty God, why does He leave them as He left Fidenatus, the sport of their foes, the outcasts of the earth? why does he not interfere to save them?"

"He never leaves them nor forsakes them for He has promised, 'When thou goest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the floods they shall not overflow thee,' yet I confess truly, my dear son, that if in this life only we have hope in Christ we are of all men the most miserable."

"But why should this be?"

"Because the path to glory lies through suffering. He has trodden that path Himself and thereby sanctified it to us; is it not even so amongst the heroes of your own mighty race? did not Brutus through suffering and finally through death give freedom to Rome? did not the heroes of your golden age through long endeavour conquer Hannibal, and secure the empire of the world? have not poets, painters, sculptors, united to give glory and fame to those who only gained the pinnacle through toil, suffering, and blood? and we, we so fight, not for a corruptible crown of fading ivy leaves, but for an incorruptible one which at last we shall receive from the Captain of our Salvation."

"But *our* heroes even while they suffered had the approbation of mankind, yours their detestation and scorn."

"But what of that, my dear son? our reward is not here, this world is not our home; our Lord sends us this suffering to wean our souls from the things of earth, and to fix them on the joys of

Heaven, that where our treasure is, there may our hearts be also."

"But the suffering is so fearful."

"Nay, my son, the grace is so much the more exalted; His strength the more perfect in our weakness."

"I feel all that you say, but it is so hard to realize; we see the dishonoured corpse of the martyr treated with the vilest indignity; we see the limbs you say are the Members of Christ, dishonoured and polluted; we see—"

"Stay, my son, He shall gather up each fragment of the dust in which He has lived and moved; the eyes which closed upon the instruments of torture, the pitiless beasts, or the yet more pitiless faces of the spectators, shall behold the King in His beauty, and the Land that is very far off; the ears which drank in as the last earthly sounds, the hootings, the yellings, the execrations of the mob, shall open to the harmonies of those who sing the new song to God and to the Lamb."

"It is enough, father. The one thing is,—may I hope for such grace, such support?"

"You may indeed, my dear son: if it fall to your lot to suffer, nay to die for Him, He will be with you to the very end; there is a joy even in death when it is death for love, and the true measure of love as of His Love is death."

"Father, tell me of Him; I want to hear more of Him, only of Him now."

And the stranger sat down by the side of the boy, and read to him from the parchment in his hand: he read of the Incarnate God a babe in His Mother's lap, of His Love displayed in miraculous deeds of mercy, of the fallen Magdalene

pardoned in Simon's house, of the lost sheep, the prodigal son, of the Agony, the Bloody Sweat, the Scourging, the Cross, the accumulated woe which broke that Heart which had clasped the world in Its ineffable Love; Æmilius could hear no more; the tears streamed down his cheeks, the work was done, he was conquered.

And they parted but only to meet again; Eteocles would be the guide to the woodland Church where the Followers of the Crucified met in secret to worship Him.

And from this moment, to the intense joy of Eteocles, Æmilius sought his company daily, almost hourly; and all that the former could tell of the Saviour and His enduring work upon earth was soon learned.

A few nights later, when the darkness of night was gathering over the solitudes of the forest, they left the villa unobserved, and sought the house in which Æmilius had found refuge from the wolves after his excursion with Eucrates. He had already suspected that this was their destination.

It was a large country house, such as were then inhabited by the better class of Syrian farmers. A light placed in the window, as on the first night when Æmilius found refuge there, guided the travellers who, from Antioch or elsewhere, sought this humble shrine. The outer apartments were simply furnished after the usage of the day, but beyond, a passage gave admittance to a large inner room furnished in a manner which Æmilius had never beheld before.

Immediately in front of the door by which they entered a screen of light woodwork divided the western portion from the body of the room; this

space was allotted to the penitents, and the *catechumens*, or candidates for Holy Baptism, and here Æmilius took his place, amidst a few companions of various ages and positions in life. Eteocles passed on to the central portion of the church, where the great body of the faithful had their place, the men on the one side, the women on the other.

Beyond this space again was a raised platform, with seats placed choir-wise, for the clergy, or those in minor orders, the acolytes, readers, and singers, and furnished with an ambo, or pulpit. A curtain completely excluded the altar from sight, but seven lamps suspended over it were visible.

Midnight had passed, and the service commenced, for in these days of cruel persecution the silent hours between midnight and dawn were frequently appropriated for the celebration of the Holy Mysteries.

The minor clergy entered, arrayed in white vestments, called, as now, albs, reaching to the feet, possessing tight sleeves, and bound round the waist with a girdle; they were followed by the deacon, who wore a richer garment over the alb, called the tunicle; and finally, by the celebrant who was arrayed in the ample phænolion, or chasuble.

The service proceeded. The priest and his deacon passing within the curtain, prayer was made, after which the hymn, or introit, was sung, during which incense ascended in clouds to the roof from behind the curtain.

The book of the Gospels was now carried in solemn procession to the ambo with lighted tapers and incense, the deacon bearing the book before the celebrant, in whom Æmilius now recognized the stranger he had met in the wood.

Then came the lections from Holy Scripture, beginning with the Old Testament, followed by the Epistle, after which the deacon read the Gospel, while the tapers were raised by the acolytes, and the people stood.

After this, the deacon cried aloud,

"Let the penitents and catechumens depart in peace."

The catechumens, amongst whom was Æmilius, had now to leave, in company with those of the baptized who were undergoing penance for some temporary apostacy or other grievous sin.

Æmilius awaited Eteocles in the outer room; he was utterly ignorant of the nature of the mysteries from which he was excluded, that knowledge being reserved for the baptized, with such care did the early Church guard the Body of her Lord. But before he left he had another interview with the priest, Cyril, and his name was formally enrolled amongst the catechumens.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CATECHUMEN.

MANY months had passed away, and it was the lovely season of spring; the neighbourhood of Antioch resounded with the songs of birds; flowers budded into life, amidst the verdant herbage of every hill; and the beautiful villa of Cornelius seemed a terrestrial paradise.

But there was one at least weary and dejected this happy season, who still groaned in bondage which he could not endure, for the one secret of endurance was unknown to him: Juba was yet a slave.

An unsuccessful foray immediately after the scenes described in the fourth chapter had aroused the whole neighbourhood, and considerably reduced the strength of the banditti, and so their designs upon the villa, where Eucrates lived in fancied security with his mother, were indefinitely postponed. Yet they were not relinquished, and therefore, although Juba had entreated permission, at many a stolen interview, to fly and join his comrades, permission was always refused; he was told he must wait till he should earn his freedom by one bold stroke for liberty, revenge, and gold. And during these weary months he strove to bear with patience, while he treasured up each blow and counted each insult. Eucrates was utterly without suspicion of the cause of the altered de-

meanour of his slave, whom he hated and despised as men commonly hate those they grievously injure.

Even at this hour, could Christianity have penetrated the heart of master or slave, the whole course of their lives would have been changed, and most deadly passions, destined to work sad evils, have been subdued; but it was not to be so. In ignorance of the true God, Juba had sold himself to the dominion of the prince of evil, and in due time he was to have the wages that prince commonly gives.

For there is much reason to believe, with the early Christians, that the idols of the heathen were not merely representatives of ideal persons, having no real existence, but that the powers of darkness, assuming to themselves the names and attributes of the false gods, did actually inspire their shrines and delude their worshippers. Thus S. Paul tells us: the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to devils, and calls the cup offered in libation to such idols, "the cup of devils."

And in those days of darkness such powers were actually exerted by the unclean spirits as find no parallel in these days. The New Testament frequently records such manifestations; early ecclesiastical history is full of them. For when the Church was slowly asserting her power over the world, and the worship of devils was dying out, they made most fearful efforts to keep their dominion intact; through their oracles and priests they stirred up the heathen to persecute, and raised storms of fury against the followers of the Cross.

The supernatural powers actually displayed at the shrines of these deities, or through their oracles, have already been exemplified; answers were literally given in a voice from beneath the ground, or through

similar means; in some instances this may have been the result of ventriloquism, but the close fulfilment of many of the predictions points to a darker and deeper power. Be this as it may, through such means was Juba devoted to a life which promised the gratification of the passions here, but left the hereafter a fearful blank, to be filled up at death.

In describing scenes like these, wherein so much that is painful to the Christian is unfolded, there is at least one advantage,—we learn what Christianity has done in the past, what it has conquered, how mighty the grace which triumphed over the powers of evil; and we also learn that even the passions of wicked men are made a sword in the Hand of God to avenge Him of His foes.

Let us turn to a brighter scene.

These months had been months of trial and endurance to Æmilius as well as to Juba, but of that trial and endurance which work together for good to those who love God.

It was stated at the conclusion of the last chapter, that he had been formally enrolled amongst the catechumens, or candidates for Holy Baptism; since that time, once at least in each week, he had attended classes, for the purpose of instruction, in the woodland Church, where, in company with a few others of different ages and conditions of life, varying from the old man on the brink of the grave to the mere child, he drank in the words of eternal life.

But there was now one deep source of pain and trouble to Æmilius, and this was the necessity of keeping his acquired faith a secret from his parents, the first he had ever concealed from them. But it

was not his own secret only,—it involved the lives and fortunes of others ; and under the circumstances secresy was absolutely necessary to the very existence of the Christian community.

In Antioch the very name of Christian first had existence, yet in no place had the Gospel to endure greater vicissitudes ; in no place had the devil striven harder to drown the faith in blood, or extinguish it by cruel persecution. Consequently, Æmilius had to lead a life which presented many painful aspects : to receive the caresses of father and mother, to feel love more deep than ever towards those dear friends, yet to know their danger as aliens from the fold of Christ, without any power to avert it, nay, with the certainty that the first intimation of his own possession of the means of grace would change their joy into the bitterest sorrow, and perhaps place an eternal barrier between their intercourse, even if the stern Roman sense of duty which, with all his love for his son, Cornelius yet possessed, did not drive him to further extremities. The love he bore for his sister Cornelia was again a source of pain. She was, like her brother, possessed of natural purity of mind, such as might have befitted the Cornelia who bore the Gracchi, but such as was extremely rare in the later days of the empire. She closely resembled her brother, from whom she was only separated by a single year, and already the graces of childhood were yielding to those of youth, with its passionate love, love which had not as yet extended its sphere beyond the family circle. Yet there was one who strove to gain that blessing, and to appropriate the first impulses of that youthful heart,—it was Eucrates. Calculation had, perhaps, induced him, in the first instance, to strive to win her affections, for was she

not the daughter of the rich Cornelius ? But it was a redeeming feature in his character, that the coarser features of his nature seemed softened in her presence, so that even Juba was safe if she interceded, and the treachery and cruelty, which were so deep in the elements of his nature, were disguised, or perhaps sank back for a brief space into non-existence. He knew not whether she returned the love ; he thought he had cause to hope, and that was all. Æmilius noticed and disliked the growing affection ; he thought, and thought rightly, that Eucrates was utterly unworthy of his sister. With her he was more unrestrained than with any other member of the family, and so it came to pass, when they were walking in the beautiful grove of plane trees before described, shaded and concealed from all observation by the rich foliage of early spring, that she put him a question, long upon her lips.

"Brother," she said, as she looked upon him with loving eyes, "do tell me one thing,—why are you so changed ? you used to be so full of life and spirits, and now you seem full of dull and mournful thoughts which hardly ever leave you."

"Am I so dull ? I am sure I have cause to be very very happy."

"You do not seem to be so, then ; and you have such strange fits sometimes. The other day, when we were all talking merrily together, you seemed to be happy and cheerful just as you used to be, and suddenly you changed in the midst of the conversation, and seemed as if you were going to cry ; your eyes filled with tears ; don't you remember, mother asked you whether you were unwell ?"

Æmilius did not answer ; and she continued—

"Oh, you must remember it. Just when you changed so suddenly, I had proposed to you to put a fresh garland on the image of Flora; we were seated on the terrace enjoying the day."

"Really, dear Cornelia, I am not unwell, and I am not unhappy.'

"Everyone notices it, and thinks it so strange. Eucrates told me the other day that you were so absent when out with him, that he did not know what to make of it; he said that you must have some secret on your breast; that perhaps you nourished a hopeless love, yet I do not know where *your* love, my brother, could be hopeless."

Æmilius hardly knew what to say; he longed to speak freely, yet he did not dare to do so, even to his beloved sister.

"Eucrates is quite wrong," he said; "no earthly love makes me unhappy."

"No earthly love! what do you mean? One would think that you were about to devote yourself, like the priests of the Egyptian Isis, to a life of celibacy, the goddess your mistress and the object of your affection."

"Do not speak of Isis or of Flora; God forbid I should worship them."

"God forbid—what God? and that reminds me, Æmilius, that you really are becoming almost an atheist. You have lost all real reverence for the gods; when we place the offerings of cakes before the Lares, or pour the libation to Vesta, you start as if they were evil demons we invoked; the very names of Jupiter, Venus, Mercury, so frequently on your lips in old times, never cross them now. Do tell me, what does it all mean?"

"And what are these gods that we should bless

them ?" said Æmilius. "Answer me, sister; would you like to have a father whose character resembled Jupiter's, or a mother like Venus, nay, a brother like Mercury ?"

It was a home-thrust, and Cornelia was silent.

"Still," she said, after a pause, "you ought to seem happier. Think of this beautiful home, these lovely gardens, the home of your boyhood, and to be one day that of your manhood; everything which can gratify the tastes is ours ; the toil, the strife of the great cities, of our ancestral home is far removed ; and whatever may be the degradation of the empire, we may live here as in the golden days of the Republic ; love may be as pure as Cornelia's, Lucretia's, or Virgilia's, courage and honour as unstained as that of Brutus or Regulus."

"And what hereafter, my sister ? what of death ? May not the events of one hour close our eyes to all this ?"

Of course we must die ; but the pure, the brave, need they fear death ? rather should they enjoy life while it lasts."

"And what then ?"

"Then we shall have left a bright memory on earth to survive us ; friends will mention our names with gratitude and love, and we shall yet live in their hearts."

"And is this all ? life, bright, joyous life to fade away into an eternal winter, and our place in the memory our only recompense ? And that place, how long will it last ? a few years and we shall be as if we had never lived. Is life worth living for, when friend after friend is torn from us, and the word written as in letters of fire upon the heart, as it bleeds from the recent wound, is 'nevermore, nevermore.'"

"Brother, why do you so excite yourself? we cannot help it."

"But we can help it; we can help it. Oh! Cornelia, what if the creed of the Nazarene be true?"

She started, looked at him, her cheeks lost their rosy colour, and assumed a pallid hue.

"Æmilius," she said, "oh, dear Æmilius, do not speak like this; the Nazarenes, who devour little infants, who worship an ass's head, who—"

"Oh, cease, Cornelia, you rend my very heart."

And Æmilius could no longer restrain his emotion; he wept, while his sister, utterly surprised, vainly strove to force her lips to frame one question which rose from sudden fear.

"No, no, it cannot be," she muttered.

"Sister," said he at last, "if you should ever hear that I, your brother, was a murderer of little children, or committed such enormities as you speak of, could you believe it? Would you ever remain firm in your love to your poor brother, whatever the world might say?"

"You need not ask me, dear Æmilius; oh, who would dare accuse you?"

He pressed her hand and was gone.

Such scenes as these were of frequent occurrence, but they were the darker spots in Æmilius's life as a catechumen. If there were days of bitter sorrow, and even of doubt, there were also days of spiritual joy, which influenced him more by the intense reality of the communion with the unseen yet ever present Lord, than volumes of controversy could have done; then indeed he was happy and all seemed easy.

But an event was at hand which he had anticipated with joy for years, but which now threatened to bring matters to a crisis.

Amongst both Romans and Greeks, the conclusion of boyhood was marked by a certain solemnity,—the exchanging the garments of youth for those of manhood ; the toga prætexta, with the bulla—a kind of golden locket suspended from the neck—were finally put aside, and the toga virilis—the distinguishing badge of the Roman citizen—was assumed.

The day ordinarily opened with a domestic sacrifice at the altar of the Lares, or household gods, in a special sacrarium or chapel, where the youth deposited the emblems of his boyhood, dedicating them to these deities, and imploring their protection for his advancing years ; after which he appeared in the forum, with a crowded retinue of friends and relations, and was then introduced to the præfect, or legatus, and his name enrolled in the list of citizens. This ordinarily took place at the close of the fifteenth or sixteenth year, and Æmilius was already beyond the usual age, so that it was finally settled by his parents that early in the ensuing month the ceremony should take place, with such modifications as residence in a colony suggested, but still in each important particular according to the Roman custom.

The garments in question had long ceased to be worn upon common occasions, but were still retained in places like Antioch as the ceremonial garb of the Roman citizen, carrying back the mind to the day when the "gens togata" was the proud appellation of that mighty race.

And upon this day, so long anticipated, Æmilius felt he must make his first great stand, and fight the first battle for the honour of His Lord : he *must* refuse to be present at the sacrifice, and this would invalidate the whole proceedings. And before that day he had every reason to hope for the gift of special

strength from God, for on Easter Eve, which fell in the week immediately preceding, he was to be enrolled amongst the soldiers of Christ by Holy Baptism. And for this he now thirsted as the hart for the water brooks ; it was to him the fount of life eternal ; daily, nay hourly, he stretched his hands to that God Whom he would so soon hail as Father ; day after day he thought, meditated upon, and dreamed of the gracious Lord Whose sweet prayer, "Our Father," would so soon be his own as a child of adoption ; and as he thus prayed and meditated, the coming struggle seemed a thing to be despised, for the love of the Lord Who had bought him.

He was so happy just then, that his friends rejoiced, and deferred their project of sending for a physician to enquire into the state of his health, for they were persuaded that illness must be the cause of the dejection of spirits which had given them so much anxiety.

Poor boy ! they were the last happy days of his home life ; he had to prove his love to the Lord, Who had claimed his heart, by sacrifice of the highest worth ; to give up all that was dear to him on earth, and to count all things as dross, that he might win Christ and be found in Him.

CHAPTER VII.

BAPTISM. THE OUTCAST.

IT was Easter Eve, A.D. 251, and the catechumens, who had so long anticipated Holy Baptism, were gathered together in the little woodland Church.

The commemoration of the Passion was over; they had followed the steps of their Lord day by day, from His triumphal entry into the holy city on Palm Sunday, to the Cross and the grave, and, fresh from the contemplation of the sufferings of the King of Martyrs, their souls filled with love and gratitude, they came to be enrolled beneath His banner.

They had received their last lesson, the Creed, which had been finally imparted by the Priest Cyril with great solemnity, and now they awaited the arrival of the Bishop Fabius, the successor of the martyred Babylas, who was about to welcome the newly enrolled soldiers of Christ in person, and to administer Confirmation immediately after Baptism.

The bishop arrived; they entered the Baptistry, a kind of Chapel situated near the western extremity of the Church, in the centre of which was the font, not, as with us, raised upon a pedestal, and of such dimensions as to prohibit the immersion of adults, but sunk in the pavement to the depth of five feet, and filled nearly to the brim with water; it was of

large dimensions, and a flight of steps descended into the pool.

The catechumens turned to the west, and renounced the devil and all his works ; to the east and repeated the creed, which profession was followed by the sign of the Cross made on forehead and heart, and by the anointing with holy oil.

The deacons then disrobed the men, and the deaconesses the women ; the officiant descended into the font, and, receiving the candidates one after the other, immersed them thrice in the name of the Holy Trinity.

Emerging from the Baptismal flood, they were clad in white attire, were given milk and honey, typical of that land of promise into which they had entered, tapers were put into their hands as tokens of the illumination they had received, and they passed in procession into the Church, where they were received with hymns of thanksgiving.

Confirmation immediately followed, and, strengthened by the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit, the candidates awaited a yet more marvellous gift, into the knowledge of which they had now to be initiated, —the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ.

With what humble faith and adoring thanksgiving Æmilius and his fellow candidates learned of the gift yet in store for them, can hardly be imagined in these colder days ; the intervening hours of preparation were hours of rapture, of trembling joy.

And between midnight and dawn of that Easter Day, the bishop celebrated the Holy Mysteries, the newly baptized yet holding their tapers in their hands.

The earlier portion of the Ritual has already been described, so far as the expulsion of the catechumens

and penitents; happily there were none present now to expel, all had been baptized or absolved.

At the point when the expulsion usually took place, commenced the Missa Fidelium.

The prayer called the Prayer of the Veil was now said, when the white linen cloth, which had hitherto hidden the elements, was solemnly removed.

Then followed the "Great Entrance," when the elements were borne to the Altar, acolytes preceding, as at the Gospel, with tapers and incense, the Bread leavened, previously presented by the congregation, the Wine mixed with water.

The Kiss of Peace was now given, the whole congregation saluting each other, the men on their side, the women on theirs.

Then began the Canon, or Anaphora, as ours still begins, with the words, "Lift up your hearts." The Preface and Sanctus followed, as now, the latter sung by the congregation.

The Prayer of Consecration succeeded, in a low tone of voice, the words of Institution being uttered in a much louder tone; then came the Prayer of Oblation, followed, as in all Eastern Liturgies, by the Invocation of the Holy Spirit.

Prayers for the quick and dead, including the touching prayer, "Gather us under the feet of Thine elect when Thou wilt and as Thou wilt, only without shame and sin," followed by the Lord's Prayer, completed this portion of the service.

Then a prayer for worthy reception, somewhat similar to our Prayer of Humble Access, and the exclamation "Holy things for holy persons," followed by the Elevation of the Blessed Sacrament.

The solemn Breaking of the Bread, and the mixture of a fragment in the Chalice succeeded, then

a general Confession of Faith in the Real Presence, and the Communion in both kinds, the clergy first communicating, then the people, and finally the newly baptized, during which the thirty-fourth psalm was sung. The Benediction and dismissal concluded the Office.

Æmilius had hardly been able to restrain his emotions during the service; he remained in the Church long after the close of the service, and at last, rejoining Eteocles, they took their road homeward in silence; joy was too deep for words. The dawn was breaking over the lovely prospect as they gained the brink of the hill above the villa, the Orontes reddening in the light of the rising sun, but Æmilius felt that a more glorious sun—the Sun of Righteousness—had risen upon him.

There was a serpent in Paradise, and there was one here, watching the dispersion of the little flock, selecting his victims, ignorant that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church.

And this enemy was a paid spy of the legatus, who had tracked the Christians to their place of worship, and watched their proceedings, selecting those victims whose persons he could identify during their arrival at the Church. Particularly he marked Æmilius, in whom he recognised, to his surprise, the son of the wealthy Cornelius.

Before the close of the day the legatus, Numerian, had received the information. He scarcely believed it, but determined to investigate the matter.

While thus meditating, he received an invitation from Cornelius, with whom he was on most intimate terms, to sup at the villa on the eve of the day when

Æmilius was to assume the "toga virilis," and he determined to delay any further proceedings until the evening in question.

It was the hour of the cœna, or banquet, and all was prepared for the reception of the guests of Cornelius. The fires blazed brightly in the kitchens, where the cook, assisted by his subordinates, was tasking all his resources to do credit to the hospitality of his master.

The triclinium, or dining couch, was placed in the spacious hall before described; it was somewhat of the form of the horse shoe, running round three sides of the table, and the guests did not sit, but reclined upon cushions of the softest wool covered with silken stuff.

The valuable drinking vessels were yet being arranged on the side tables when Cornelius entered accompanied by his guests and family. They were nine in number,—Cornelius, his wife, son and daughter, Eucrates and his mother, the legatus, Lentulus, a fellow soldier of Cornelius in earlier days, who was passing through Antioch in order to take the command of the Roman garrison at Nisibis in the far east, and Cyriades, a gentleman of Antioch, of Greek descent.

The guests took their places; the slaves took off their sandals and poured water into silver bowls for their ablutions. Meanwhile they complimented their host upon the beauty of his newly decorated saloon, where, in gorgeous colours, the native talent of Antioch had depicted upon the walls scenes from the past glories of Roman history: the Suicide of Lucretia; Regulus departing from Rome to his African torturers; Decius devoting himself to death for his country; and Curtius leaping into the yawning gulf.

And now the first course appeared. It consisted chiefly of eggs dressed in every conceivable mode, accompanied by the productions of the garden, while wines of exquisite flavour were carried round in golden goblets by youthful slaves trained for that purpose.

Then followed course after course in rapid succession, each richer than its predecessor; all that could tempt the appetite was there, and, as the banquet continued, wines near a century in age, the produce of Falernian vineyards, were poured into the silver colum, a strainer which was previously filled with fresh snow from Libanus, and the delicious beverage was thence transferred, in the golden cyathus, to glasses of the colour of amethyst, to be handed round to the guests.

The slaves now entered bearing the chief dish of the feast,—a huge boar caught in the neighbouring woods, and cooked whole, surrounded by pastry fashioned into the form of sucking pigs; meanwhile baskets containing dried fruits were offered to the company.

Then followed peacocks, pheasants, artificial birds, made skilfully of pastry, and stuffed with the choicest fruit, succeeded by the richest dessert wealth could procure, fresh from garden and hothouse.

And during the banquet sweet music delighted the ear, while at intervals fragrant perfumes descended like thin mist and filled the room. All that could captivate the senses was there. Civilisation had reached its utmost limit in the perfection of that which ministered to the gratification of the body, and was rapidly producing, as a natural result, effeminacy and sloth, so that, in the words of Horace, each generation seemed inferior in all that constitutes the *man* to its predecessors.

Yet, so severe were the morals of Cornelius, that much was banished from his table which would have found ready admittance elsewhere. While he did not care to render himself conspicuous by deviating from the customs of the world around him, he inwardly sighed for the stern simplicity of those days when Romans were Romans indeed; and it seemed to him that the figures of Brutus, Regulus, and Decius frowned upon the effeminate luxury of his own entertainment.

But to Æmilius there was little pleasure that day. On the morrow he had to wage a hard battle, and he felt sad and depressed.

While the guests had been busy in satisfying their appetites, conversation had been desultory, and the sweet music had rendered silence attractive; but towards the conclusion of the banquet, the wine exerted its usual influence, and the guests found their tongues.

"The news from Rome," said the legatus, "is somewhat exciting. It appears the Goths have issued from their deserts and crossed the Danube; the immortal Decius has left the city with the flower of his troops to chastise them."

"Who are these Goths?" said Cyriades.

"Utter barbarians," replied Lentulus, "but, at the same time, good soldiers; no one who has met them, as I have, in fight, can afford to despise them."

"But where do they come from?" asked Æmilius and Eucrates together.

"From the cold dreary regions to the north of Dacia," answered Lentulus, "and, inured from infancy to bear cold, hunger, and thirst, they can keep the field when our southern constitutions would utterly give way."

"I would," said Cornelius, "that we had another Camillus; the Goths are not more hardy than the Gauls whom he conquered."

"The age of iron has passed," replied Lentulus, "and I say it with pain, but it is a sad truth that we are not the men our fathers were, and even Decius is not Julius, the greatest of the Cæsars."

"The times are indeed dark and threatening," said the legatus, "Germans press our troops on the frontiers of the Rhine and upper Danube; Goths threaten to invade Thrace and Macedonia; even our most remote colonies in Britain call for aid against Picts and Scots, as those in the world's opposite extremity, where you are going, Lentulus, cry for aid against the new and warlike prince of Persia, Sapor."

"Yes," added Cyriades, "Romulus saw ten vultures, and the augurs said Rome should endure ten centuries; her time is at hand. We have but yesterday seen Philip, the late emperor, who is with the gods, celebrating the thousandth anniversary of the city by the great secular games."

"Rome will never fall," said Cornelius proudly, "the gods have promised that she shall ever endure, triumphant over every foe."

"Greece once was as Rome is now," replied Cyriades, "and Alexander as mighty as Cæsar; where are his conquests?"

The conversation was becoming too animated, for Cyriades was commonly suspected of secret hatred of the Roman dominion, and his words were very obnoxious to the legatus, who was about to reply warmly when Cornelius changed the subject.

"Has there not been a great pestilence in Mœsia?" he asked.

"Yes," said the legatus, "and thousands have

perished miserably ; there are not enough left to till the fields, or resist the barbarians, while famine threatens whole provinces."

"But what a list of calamities !"

"There is a reason," continued the legatus, "for all this, and the priests and augurs all concur in giving it."

"What can it be ?" said Cyriades, somewhat sarcastically.

"The gods, by whose blessing Rome became Rome, and the mistress of the world, are angry with us and withdraw their favour."

"What is the matter with them," replied Cyriades, "have not they sufficient incense and garlands ?"

"The Christians still exist," said the legatus.

"I am opposed to severity in most cases," said Cornelius, "but if these miscreants could but be rooted out I should not care what means were used."

"We do not scruple to use means," said the legatus, "racks, red-hot pincers, hooks, the wild beasts, the iron chair, have all been tried, and the amphitheatres have been very lively, especially at Rome."

"How I should like to be there !" observed Eucrates.

"But still there are tens of thousands undiscovered, and their enormities provoke the gods : the blood of little children, shed in their mysteries, in offering to an ass's head, cries for vengeance, and every iniquity is committed in their secret meetings, where they actually feed on the flesh of their victims."

"Have we many left in Antioch ?" said Cornelius abruptly.

"There are many I fear ; and we have but just received information of a secret meeting held a few

days back. Many of the atheists actually belong to the higher classes of society, and are found in company where they would be least suspected."

As he spoke, he fixed his glance upon Æmilius, who first turned pale, then red, and slightly trembled.

"Æmilius," said his mother, "are you not well? Cornelia, pass the water. Do you feel faint?"

"It is nothing," he gasped.

"The room is so hot," said his father; "let us take a turn in the gardens, while the slaves prepare for the symposium."

The change to the coolness of the outer air tranquillised Æmilius in a certain measure, but he could not but feel that the crisis he had so long dreaded was at hand. He walked alone, when his sister joined him.

"Dear Æmilius, what was it?" she said. "I saw the legatus look at you as he spoke, and then you quivered beneath his glance, as if he had pointed you out as a concealed Nazarene. Oh! Æmilius, what dreadful secret is this? Can you not tell your sister? See, the legatus is walking with our father! how earnestly they talk!"

He made no answer, and she began to weep. Æmilius felt the necessity of summoning all his energies; he strove to restrain the tears which started to his own eyes, but strove in vain; he felt a feeling like suffocation, as if he would willingly sink into the earth and be seen no more.

Let not the reader misjudge him, Æmilius was very brave. Had he been called, as many Christian boys were, to die in the amphitheatre, leaving Christian parents behind him, receiving their last fond blessing, parting but to meet in a brighter sphere, he could have despised death; but his cross was harder;

he had to inflict the bitterest agony on those who loved him best, and the conflict in his soul was terrible.

His father now approached him.

"Æmilius, come with me; I wish to speak with you."

They walked in silence, along the paths, towards the grove of plane trees. Æmilius could hear the beating of his own heart, but for a few minutes neither spoke; each was summoning up his resolution for the effort.

"Æmilius," said his father at length, "you have ever been truthful; you never told me a lie, and now I am going to ask you a question which I can hardly bring my lips to frame."

He paused, but at last spoke with manifest reluctance:

"Were you at the assembly of the Nazarenes the other night?"

A vivid temptation, the strongest he had ever felt, came upon Æmilius to deny his faith; he conquered by a superhuman effort, truly superhuman, for the grace to conquer was Divine.

"Father," he said, "I was."

Cornelius started as though an adder had stung him. He lifted his arm as if he would strike his son, but restrained himself, and in a voice which trembled with emotion, continued his interrogations.

"Why were you there? Oh! tell me, my dear boy. Was it as a citizen, jealous for the honour of the gods, anxious to denounce these atheists to the authorities? if so it was an indiscreet act, but—"

"No, father, it was not for that purpose."

"Why, then? It surely cannot be; you cannot be a Christian!"

"Father, *I am.*" And when he had said these words he shook like an aspen leaf.

"Oh, no! unsay those words; it cannot be. Do you know what Christians are?"

"Father, you misjudge them, indeed you do. We do not sacrifice little infants, we do not commit any iniquities, we do not worship an ass's head, we do not rebel against our emperor."

"Then," said Cornelius, "there is a test which can be at once applied, and it will save you; the emperor has ordered his subjects to swear by his divinity, to scatter incense at his shrine; come with me and do so."

"Oh! father, I cannot; we worship the One True God; we can worship no other."

"Do you know the alternative, foolish, cruel boy? Do you remember the games of last autumn, and Fidenatus?"

"Father, I can die as he did."

"Æmilius, you wring my very heart: you, my only son,—my darling child,—the hope of my old age,—the descendant of a race of heroes,—you, *you* a Christian,—you to bring disgrace upon my name, to embitter my declining years! Do you know, cruel boy, that you will kill your mother—your mother who loves you so dearly? Oh! you cannot; you have always been a good son; come now, tell the legatus all; he will conceal it, for my sake, and all shall be forgiven; it shall never be mentioned again, never even mentioned."

"Father," said Æmilius; but he could say no more; he fell upon the grass and sobbed as though his heart would break. It seemed a comfort to the poor father, and he waited till the agony had a little subsided.

"Come, Æmilius, and tell the legatus all; come at once, and end this misery."

"Father, he stammered, "it is of no use; I cannot deny my faith; I was baptized *that* night; I have been initiated into the Holy Mysteries; I cannot deny my Lord. Oh! father, spare me this agony; this is worse than death; let the legatus do what he likes, but do not curse me, my father."

They remained silent for a long space, until Cornelius recovered himself; he took his son by the hand, and led him to the edge of the forest, to the brink of the hill on the verge of the grove.

"Æmilius," he said, "you are my own boy; I cannot consign you to an ignominious death, but I cannot shelter you; I cannot break the laws of my country, for I am a Roman; you must make your choice,—to give up home, and your mother, sister, and father, to take your chance in the world, under a false name, that we may never hear of the fate you cannot long escape as a Christian,—to give up the home of your youth, and to leave your miserable and bereaved parents to wander forth a vagabond; or, on the other hand, you must resolve to tell the legatus all."

"Father, I cannot help it; I must go; let me but see dear mother once more."

"No; if you must go, better never see her again; you will break her heart as it is, Oh! would that you had never lived to deal us this blow; would that I had died ere I had seen this day! And to-morrow, when you were to appear in the garb of manhood for the first time, where shall I hide my head? how shall I tell my friends? Oh, Æmilius, my son, spare me!"

No answer was made, but the poor boy clung

fondly around his father's neck, and they wept together. At last Cornelius recovered himself and disengaged the arms of his son.

"Choose," he said, "choose, Æmilius."

"Father, I must go."

"Save yourself, then," said Cornelius. "Alas! I have no son; never may we gaze on each other again! Go, cruel boy; I cannot curse you; hide yourself as you best can amongst your new friends; a father's curse upon *them* if not upon you. Do not be taken; leave the country; go away, quite away; here is gold, it will supply your present needs. Farewell for ever!"

He pointed across the grounds, but still Æmilius could not stir—*could* not. At last steps were heard approaching.

"It is the legatus," said Cornelius; "fly, or you are lost; do not stay; go at once."

Æmilius slowly left the grounds, often stopping to cast a lingering look behind. He saw the windows of the dining-hall gleaming with lights; he heard the distant sound of music; he gazed upon the lovely home he was leaving; but he went and took his way across the woods, towards the Church so often introduced to notice.

And as he went along weeping, a sudden calm came over his soul; for the very image of the Crucified seemed suddenly before him with the nail prints and the thorny crown, while a sweet voice seemed to say—It is well done, child of My love; thou hast conquered, and thou shalt in no wise lose thy reward. In Me is peace; hide thee in My wounded Side, wounded for thee. Speak, My child, is it peace?

"It is, O Lord, peace, peace in Thee."

CHAPTER VIII.

FRUSTRATED REVENGE.

A MONTH had passed since Æmilius had left home, and his friends had not heard of him; he had utterly disappeared; the legatus, out of regard to Cornelius, had kept the matter secret, and the world only guessed at the truth.

Cornelius had suspected, and more than suspected, Eteocles of being privy to his son's conversion, but he did not make enquiries, which he felt could only end in consigning the young Greek to the amphitheatre; yet he suspended his design of manumitting him, and, partly as a punishment, lent him as a personal slave to Eucrates.

The condition of Eteocles was indeed changed for the worse. Eucrates had always hated him, and now he made him feel it; every indignity he could heap upon him he inflicted,—not merely blows, but taunts and insults, which stung more keenly. But all this was only in private, for Cornelius would not have tolerated it; and even this restraint aggravated the animosity of Eucrates.

Eteocles longed to see Æmilius, and sought anxiously for the chance of visiting the woodland Church, where he trusted to gain information, but

his new master suspected him to be a Christian like Æmilius, for he had penetrated the secret, and watched him too closely.

But at last a chance came; it was the evening of a day when he had been treated with extraordinary cruelty by Eucrates, and his back was yet bleeding from stripes inflicted with a leather thong, while the anguish of the infliction still endured. Striving manfully to repress his feelings, yet very miserable, he took advantage of the temporary absence of Eucrates, owing to an invitation from his uncle, to enter the forest in the hope of reaching the Church already introduced to notice, and returning before his master came back.

He reached the Church and found it empty. The place had been discovered by the spies of the legatus, as before related, and the Christians, taking the alarm, forebore to assemble there, while the pagans left it unmolested as a convenient centre for their operations.

Eteocles consequently returned earlier than he had anticipated, yet he had to penetrate the woods in the darkness, and in some manner lost his way. He was hesitating what to do, when he heard the sound of approaching footsteps, and at the same moment perceived the gleam of a distant light which drew nearer each moment. He knew there were robbers in the forest, and prepared to fly, when he perceived, by the light of the moon which had now risen, that the large oak beneath which he stood was easy to climb and admirably adapted for concealment; he swung himself up in a moment, and, strange to say, found, when he had done so, that the path of the strangers led immediately beneath the tree. They passed slowly, and, by the light of

a torch they carried, he marked the ferocious aspect of the men, and the gleaming weapons they bore; but as they passed he caught two sentences which startled him.

"Do you think Juba will keep his word, and that we may depend upon him?"

"Yes, he has pluck enough for anything; and think how he hates his master."

He waited until the band had passed, then hastened to descend, for he fully comprehended the meaning of the words, his one desire being to save his cruel master. It is true that he felt the smart of the stripes at that moment, but the noble boy had learned of that Master Who from the Cross prayed for His murderers, and he collected all his energies to return good for evil.

And now he pondered for a few minutes upon the best mode of extricating himself from the forest; it seemed agonizing to be lost there when life was at stake. The idea of following the banditti suggested itself, and he did so at a considerable distance, trusting that he should strike some path which he knew. At last the band paused at the summit of a hill, bare of trees, with the exception of a huge pine, which had recently been struck by lightning.

Eteocles knew the hill, and ran with all the speed he could command in the direction of the villa of Cornelius, where there was an armed force sufficient for the emergency. He reached it at length, knocked at the door till he had roused the porter, besought permission to speak to Cornelius, and told him all that was necessary to enable him to comprehend the situation of affairs.

"But what is the matter with you?" said Cor-

nelius, "your tunic is torn and your back bloody."

Eteocles did not answer, but a flush arose on his face.

Cornelius bit his lip, and muttered some words between his teeth; nevertheless he gave his orders with the promptitude of an old soldier, and started with fifty armed slaves within ten minutes of the arrival of Eteocles.

Juba had retired to his cell that night, weary of his daily toil, weary of his long-continued servitude; to his cell, but not to rest. He never entered his bed until after midnight, but watched the distant forest, hoping to behold the signal.

And this night he was not disappointed. At the hour of midnight he saw a spark of light which might have been taken for a star but for the irregularity of the flame, and he well knew the situation of the blasted pine. He uttered an exclamation of savage joy, and, opening his door, groped his way into the passages leading to the atrium. He reached the cell of the porter, who slept as before; he grasped the key; all was silent; he made his way to the door, opened it wide, and stood on the terrace in front to welcome his friends.

At last he beheld their dark forms issuing from the gloom of the forest, and hastened to meet them.

The captain advanced. "Is all well?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Juba, "the door is open."

There was no other dwelling near, and the villa was completely at their mercy.

Their plan was very simple. They entered the villa; reaching the atrium, they lit large flaming torches, and proceeded to force open the various doors.

Aroused by the noise and the glare of the torches, several unfortunate inmates appeared, but they were at once cut down without mercy.

"This way," shouted Juba, "this way;" and he led them to the chamber of his master, who, in abject terror, forgetting his mother and everyone but himself, was barricading the door of his room.

The banditti had already assaulted the door with an axe, and it had begun to yield, when a tremendous shout was raised without, and a sudden irruption took place into the atrium through the opened door. It was Cornelius and his party, who now entered with fierce cries, and the sounds of deadly conflict instantly arose.

Veterans although the banditti were, they were utterly outnumbered, and, from the first, resistance was hopeless, so that, at an early period in the fight, their leader gave the signal for retreat. And most of the band did escape, after having slain more than a dozen of their assailants; but they left nearly half their number either dead on the pavement of the atrium, or captives in the hand of their foes; amongst these was Juba.

The fight was over, and Cornelius counted the prisoners, who were securely bound. He recognised Juba, and seemed about to address him, when he checked himself, and said,—

"Justice must be done, but merit shall be rewarded before crime is punished."

It was a strange scene: the dead bodies yet lay on the floor of the atrium, and the torchlight flickered on their ghastly features. Eucrates, pale but exultant, stood near his uncle, who beckoned Eteocles from amid the crowd of expectant slaves.

"Eteocles," he said, "draw near. You have

saved the lives of two masters; first, of one whose name may not pass my lips, or those of my household, but who was a kind and loving master to you; secondly, of one who had inflicted stripes upon you, which must have been undeserved, from which you must yet have smarted when you exerted all your energies to save him. Such merit can no longer pass unrewarded. You are free—free from this moment, and the legal formalities shall be at once completed. You may stay with me if you will, and you are worthy to supply the place of the son I have lost, or you may depart if you will, but you will leave behind one who will ever regard you with confidence and esteem."

"For you, Juba," he continued, looking with a cold and severe glance at the unhappy captive, "your crime has been unpardonable, and you cannot expect mercy; prepare, therefore, to die. I shall send you at once to the authorities, and you will doubtless be doomed to the lions."

"Nay, uncle," said Eucrates, who was deeply chagrined at the loss of Eteocles, and the reproof his uncle had administered, "Juba is my own slave, and I can do as I please with him."

"Why, nephew, what would you do?" replied the astonished Cornelius.

"He will find out before the sun is high," said Eucrates.

"The question rests with your mother," replied Cornelius, "she is the mistress; you are yet a minor."

"I will answer for her," said he pertly.

Cornelius did not leave until he had seen the widow, but she was completely a slave to the caprices of her boy, and he had his way. Cor-

nelius left in great anger at the ingratitude thus manifested, and Juba remained a prisoner in the hands of his master.

Bound with cords drawn so tightly that the blood started and circulation was utterly impeded, his hands behind his back, Juba was tossed into the *ergastulum*, or prison for the slaves, a hole seldom out of use in the villa of Melissa, the mother of Eucrates. Even here he was not suffered to rest in peace; his cruel master sought him, to feast upon his agony and despair, and to utter taunts which were received in perfect silence.

Wearied at last of this amusement, and spurning the unfortunate slave with his foot, he withdrew to superintend the labours of the slaves in the grove, at the further extremity of the gardens attached to the villa. They were erecting a heavy cross; digging a deep hole in the ground, and securing it therein with stays so firmly that it would support a much greater weight than the unhappy boy for whom it was designed.

When the sun had fully risen, and when the other captives had been sent to the prison of Antioch and the dead interred, Juba was brought forth. His brave spirit had not forsaken him; he yet disdained to ask for mercy, which would not have been accorded, and although he trembled and his dark features assumed an ashy hue, no words of entreaty escaped his lips.

He was not to be secured with nails, but by cords; but this was not in mercy,—exposure, hunger, thirst, were to be the means of death. In silence the slaves, who acted as executioners, did their work, perhaps feeling in their hearts sympathy

for the sufferer, but not daring to evince it even by a look.

It was done, and Eucrates gazed upon his victim. To prevent the possibility of escape, he arranged guards to relieve each other in turn from amongst the slaves he thought he could trust the most, and left his victim, returning however, from time to time, to gaze upon the scene.

The cross had been planted so as to encounter the fiercest rays of the noon-tide sun, and the unfortunate sufferer soon endured cruel pangs from the heat, which seemed to make the blood boil in his veins, while a parching thirst consumed him; over head a few carrion birds hovered, and once a hideous vulture almost flapped its wings in his very eyes, only sailing away reluctantly when it perceived that life yet remained.

Eternity lay before him, yet he knew no God save the dark deities to whom he had so recently devoted himself, and they seemed to mock him, or to be impotent to save; not one ray of purer light had ever dawned upon his benighted mind.

The day passed away, but long before its close fever had set in with its raging pangs, and the unhappy boy was becoming delirious; uncouth and hideous forms seemed to hover before him, gaunt spectres to arise and mock him, while the deceitful vision of the cavern, with its delusive promises of the future, ever and anon recurred to his mind, with accessories which made the blood curdle in his veins only to flow again in yet more scorching currents through their channels.

The sun set, but he hardly knew it; night, blank and cloudy, set in, and the cold night air began to inflict its share of torture. Eucrates stood beneath:

he gazed upon his victim, he heard the delirious sentences which issued from his lips, he doubled the guard, and then retired to rest.

He could not sleep long, for he was in a state of great mental excitement; the pleasures of satisfied revenge,—hatred of Eteocles, in spite of the service he had rendered,—jealous fear that his uncle might adopt the young Greek in the place of Æmilius, and that he might thereby lose the rich inheritance, —all united to keep him from repose. The moon-beams at last fell upon his chamber floor, as the clouds, which had concealed the orb hitherto, were dispersed by the wind, and he muttered, "I should like to see how he looks by moonlight."

He arose and went to a neighbouring casement, from which the cross was visible.

"I cannot make it out," he said; "surely my eyes deceive me."

He rubbed them, and looked again with the same result. His anxiety became so great that he descended, opened the door, and entered the garden.

"Davus,—Pluto," he cried."

No answer was returned, only the cold wind sighed amongst the trees. He approached the cross; he did not see the guards; a black cloud was over the moon; he waited impatiently till it was gone; the moon shone forth brightly,—*the cross had lost its burden!*

What could it mean! He called the guards; he rushed back to the house when they did not reply, roused the sleeping domestics, and returned with torches, only to find that his eyes had not deceived him.

"Search for the dogs who were set to guard him,

for Pluto and Davus; they shall take his place," he shouted.

There was a slight stir amongst the slaves, who were bending over an object extended at full length on the ground. Hastening to the spot, Eucrates beheld the dead body of Davus, stabbed to the heart by a single blow; there was only one wound. They searched the neighbouring grove, and very quickly found the body of the other unfortunate slave stabbed in a like manner; there were no evidences of any struggle.

Torches were held to the ground, and there were impressions which denoted that many had been engaged in the rescue; and there was no longer room for doubt that the survivors amongst the banditti, guarding Juba's life as their own, had taken him from the cross, but whether in time to save his life was questionable.

Having no means to follow up the search himself, no force strong enough to enter the forest, Eucrates sent messengers at once to the legatus and to his uncle. The first speedily sent to inform him that since he had taken the law into his own hand, and thereby prevented the authorities from putting Juba to the question and gaining most important information, he might conclude the matter as he had begun it. Cornelius returned him a cold, severe answer, and refused any further assistance.

It is needless to say that Eucrates did not trust himself in the forest with such a slender retinue as his own slaves would have afforded, and so he was forced to let the matter rest. His rage and disappointment knew no bounds; besides, for the first time, he comprehended that his slave might be a dangerous enemy, and he besought his mother to

leave their villa under the care of the villicus, or bailiff, until they could sell it, and meanwhile to retire to Antioch, which she at once consented to do.

From no generous motive, but from sheer policy, and partly, perhaps, from regard to Cornelia, he strove to appease the indignation of his uncle, who was of a forgiving disposition, and soon permitted him to take his old position as a frequent visitor at the villa. Eteocles was still there, but he had the position of a guest not a slave, and it seemed evident that a more familiar place in the household might soon be his; this Eucrates could not endure, and like a serpent he waited for a chance of satisfying his malice.

Well might he have these bitter feelings, for his recent behaviour had rendered everyone cool towards him, and Cornelia avoided his company.

But he had one bright idea; he felt sure that Eteocles was a Christian, that he attended Christian worship secretly, and perhaps met Æmilius; if he could prove this, another obstacle would be removed from his path. So he courted the favour of the young Greek; he pretended to be very grateful to him for the service he had rendered, and he strove by wily conversation to find confirmation for his opinions; but Eteocles was far too wise for this to happen; he knew Eucrates and understood him. The only resource was to watch, and this Eucrates did, both in person and through paid agents, for there were plenty of fellows in Antioch quite ready to earn a day's wages in this way. So a few weeks passed by without any event worthy of being recorded.

CHAPTER IX.

HEATHEN GRATITUDE.

NUMERIAN, the governor of Antioch, or legatus, so often introduced to our readers, was seated at his ease upon a couch placed amidst the columns of the peristylium of the legatine palace; he had finished his dinner, and felt that lassitude creep over him which not unnaturally follows a day of prolonged exertion. A confidential slave approached him, and gave him information which did not seem acceptable.

"What! at this time of the evening; what can he have to talk about? what discovery can he have made? something about that slave of his, whom he gave to feed the crows, only the crows lost their banquet?"

"He says it concerns the atheists, the Christians."

"Let it wait till the morrow then."

"He assured me he would not detain you a moment, but that the opportunity might be lost by delay."

"Shew him in then,—let him come here."

And Eucrates, who had bribed the slave to obtain him this interview, was introduced. The legatus received him with courtesy, and concealed

the effort it cost him to do so, but Eucrates was connected with the aristocracy of Antioch, and moved in the same circle of society with the governor himself.

"In what way can I oblige you?" he said. "I feel sure some especial cause brings you here to-night. Anything concerning your runaway slave?"

"No, unfortunately he seems to have left no trace behind him, but I am not without hope that he will never give more trouble; he was almost dead when last seen, and they could have borne little more than his corpse away."

"All is well that ends well, so your business does not concern him."

"No, it concerns a matter which afflicts me very deeply, and it has cost me a great effort to come here."

"Ah! indeed!"

"Yes, but my duty as one who has had the dignity of Roman citizenship conferred upon him, leaves me no choice, a good citizen must sacrifice even his dearest ties for the good of the state."

"Spoken like a second Brutus," said the legatus, "but I trust the sacrifice you have to make is not so painful as his."

"Alas, it is!"

"What? you forget he gave up his sons to the victors."

"And I, I must surrender one to whom I owe my life itself."

The legatus was becoming interested. He was a good judge of character, a thorough Roman with a Roman's virtues and a Roman's vices, and perhaps we should reckon amongst the latter distrust of the Greeks."

"I know not," he said somewhat sarcastically, "whether to pity or admire you the most, until you have told me all."

"You will remember my cousin Æmilius."

"Well, indeed,"

"He had a favourite slave, Eteocles."

"Who saved your life."

"Yes, the same; and it is that which causes me the pain I now feel, for it is my sad duty to denounce him as a Christian."

"By Hercules," said the legatus, "this is Roman virtue. It must have cost you a tremendous effort, but of course you are fully prepared with proof of the fact."

"I am fully prepared, and the duty has forced itself upon me to lay before you the evidence. Firstly, I can bring witnesses to prove that Eteocles has attended secret meetings of Christians in the forest, and that he has met my cousin Æmilius."

"Witnesses!" said the legatus, "then your discoveries were not altogether accidental. May I ask what first excited the suspicions of these witnesses?"

Eucrates reddened, in spite of his effrontery, and then said, "I employed them to learn whether my suspicions had any foundation."

"Do you intend to leave them the reward the state allows to informers?"

"Certainly, the gods forbid I should touch blood-money."

"Then they must come forward and give the information to the proper authorities, but what other evidence have you?"

"During the absence of Eteocles, who occupied a room adjacent to my own, at my uncle's

villa, I entered his chamber, and discovered this manuscript."

As he spoke he handed the legatus a copy of the Gospel according to S. John.

Numerian looked over it carefully.

"This," he said, "is proof-positive, it is indeed one of their mystic books."

He seemed lost in thought for a few minutes, then continued.

"Of course my duty is to see that the law takes its course, but I suppose you would wish me to deal gently with the unfortunate boy, and to give him every chance."

"Yes," said Eucrates, lowering his eyes for he could not meet the searching glance of the legatus.

"Then I will visit the villa in a few days; stay, I may get there to-morrow, and I will first see Cornelius, then I will examine the boy myself; I may save him by kind means; if they fail, the lad who saved your life must lose his own."

"May I beg one favour?" said Eucrates. "Let my visit be a secret; do not tell my uncle who gave you the information, he would not quite understand my motives."

"It shall be as you request."

Eucrates left his presence. "I think matters are in train, now," he said, as he retired, "Eteocles will not deny his faith; when he is gone Cornelia will think no more of him, and it shall be hard if I don't soon get into my uncle's favour again. I wish Æmilius could suffer with him. They deserve to die, Christian miscreants, cannibals, worshippers of an ass as they are. Yet I wish it could be done by other means than mine; how strangely the legatus spoke."

Cornelius was already meditating upon the necessity of putting the same question to Eteocles which the legatus proposed to ask him, but simply with the intention of sending him forth, if his suspicions proved true, as he had already sent forth his only son.

He was a striking example of Roman virtue himself; the courage and devotion of Eteocles addressed themselves to his warmest sympathies, and he would do much to save the poor boy. He was thinking upon this subject, while walking upon the terrace in the evening of the day succeeding that on which Eucrates sought the legatus, when he beheld a horseman, splendidly mounted, riding over the sward of the park, and on nearer approach recognised the legatus.

He awaited his arrival on the terrace, welcomed him warmly, and, consigning the horse to the care of a slave, led him into the library, before introduced to notice, understanding that he had some private communication to make.

When they had exchanged a few remarks upon the topics of the day, the legatus spoke.

"Cornelius," he said, "I have to crave your pardon for introducing a very painful subject again, and causing a wound but half healed to smart afresh."

Cornelius did not speak; he anticipated the meaning of all this.

"Do you know by what means your unhappy boy became a Christian?"

"No," said Cornelius.

"Do you suspect any person?"

"I fear I do, but suspicion is no ground to proceed upon in such a matter."

"It may be cleared up though," said the legatus, "and indeed, Cornelius, *must* be at once; for information has been again laid against one of your household."

Cornelius appeared much distressed.

"This Christianity is a grievous thing," he said, "it seems catching as a pestilence, and it always seems to attack the noblest natures. What can be done? It is in the air; I went to Antioch the other day, to call upon the artist who designed the decorations for my villa, I found the images of the immortal gods, which formerly adorned his portico, all smashed to atoms; I asked the reason, 'Because they are all evil demons,' he said. Since then I have heard he is a candidate for the attention of the lions. It is spreading every day, torture does not subdue it, even the decree of the divine Decius has been torn down by some of their sympathisers and now—"

"Now," said the legatus, "I must see Eteocles, for it is he."

"Poor boy," said Cornelius, "do *all* you can to save him; tell him that if he will but give up this superstition, he shall be my adopted son. I have no one now Æmilius is gone."

"There is Eucrates," said the prefect.

"Yes," said Cornelius, "I am tolerably sure *he* will never be a Christian, but—"

He checked himself and said no more, but went out, desiring the legatus to await the arrival of Eteocles in the library.

He found Eteocles in his own little chamber, searching about eagerly as if he had lost something.

"Eteocles," he said, "the legatus is here."

The boy started.

"And he wishes to see you."

Eteocles clasped his hands convulsively, and his lips moved.

"Why are you alarmed? what causes this emotion?" said Cornelius, "my boy, I trust all will be well; there is no danger if you only retrace your steps, if it is as I suppose; only be wise, do not throw your life away for a miserable superstition; no one can save you if you do not save yourself; you will find the legatus very kind, he will forgive everything, if you are but sorry for it now."

Eteocles seized his kind patron's hand, and pressed it earnestly. Cornelius led him to the library, opened the door, and the boy was alone with the legatus.

The legatus saw at once that the accusation was founded on fact, and that the only chance lay in apostacy.

"Eteocles," he said, "I have often heard of you, and heard much in your favour, how you saved your first master's life, by an act of daring unexampled in these degenerate days; how you recently saved a less kind lord from the hands of the banditti, and thereby won the applause of the world; I have long wished to see you, the more so as I hear Cornelius is about to adopt you as his son."

Eteocles slightly started at the information, and seeing he was expected to speak, said,—"I thank you, my lord, Cornelius has ever been a kind master to me."

"Then, my boy, to come to the point, I hope you will not pain him now."

Eteocles hung his head.

"An accusation has been made against you which I trust is false, but one which can be instantly cleared up. It is said you do not worship the immortal gods, even hinted that you corrupted your late master, Æmilius."

Eteocles was about to answer and avow all, when the legatus interrupted him.

"Do not speak unnecessarily," he said, "the matter is very simple, swear by the genius of the emperor, scatter incense before the Lares in my presence, and I myself will maintain your innocence against your accusers, you need not say any more."

"My lord," said Eteocles, "I thank you for your kindness, I know you would save me from what you consider a hard fate, but I am a Christian, I cannot swear by the genius of the emperor, or burn incense to your gods."

"Foolish boy," said the legatus, "you have not considered the matter, you do not know how grievous are the penalties you incur, from which neither Cornelius nor I can save you."

"My lord," said Eteocles, "I know I am very weak and that I dread pain very much, but I am the servant of One Whose strength is made perfect in weakness, and I know He will help me."

"But does He help His own? have you never been to the amphitheatre?"

"Though he slay me yet will I trust in Him."

"I cannot understand all this," said the legatus, "but the words of the Augustus I can understand; I will read you the last paragraph.

"'*And if any Christian presume to disobey our divine command, and refuse to sacrifice, we order*

him to be thrown in chains and subjected to divers tortures.

"'*But if thereupon he be persuaded to obey, he shall receive no slight honour, otherwise he shall first receive many tortures, and then die by the sword, by drowning, by the beasts, or by the fire.*'"

"I know it all," said Eteocles, "I have read it several times posted up in red letters in the forum."

"And can one so young, so frail as you appear, bear to contemplate such agony."

"I know my flesh is very weak, and I feel it tremble even now; if I were left to myself I know I should fail."

"What strange madness is this, how could One Who could not even save Himself save you? One Who perished generations back: it is utter folly, to die for a memory; I can understand Damon dying for Pythias, or Nisus for Euryalus, but they lived together, while you talk of dying for one neither you nor your grandfather ever saw."

"My lord, it is not a mere memory, He lives yet, He dwelleth even within us, He is ever near."

"I cannot hear any more of this, my boy; forget all this nonsense, remember your position, Cornelius who loves you dearly, offers you, through me, to adopt you as his son, to make you the heir to this beautiful domain."

"Oh, cease, my lord, to tempt me! for the sake of Christ I am ready to die. Thank Cornelius for me, I pray God to give him his reward, and shall yet pray for him, when this world knows me no more."

"It is useless to prolong this interview," said the legatus, "you must be sent to the prison at once;

do not charge me with the hardships you may receive; I have now the sad task of breaking the news to your kind patron."

"My lord," said Eteocles, "I have one favour, and only one, to ask you, will you permit me to go free one more day, and I pledge you the word of a Christian I will deliver myself up to the authorities in Antioch, before mid-day to-morrow. I have one dear friend I would see before I die."

"It is a hard request," said the legatus, "but I will trust you, I know you Christians keep your word; to-morrow then, we shall expect you at the basilica at the hour of noon."

And the legatus went forth; Cornelius was awaiting him on the terrace, and they walked in the gardens together.

"All is well, I hope," said Cornelius, "I see Eteocles crossing the park."

"No," replied the legatus, "it is not well; he has avowed his Christianity, and even pleaded his faith in such a way as to cause me some emotion, but our only chance of saving him is by the torture; he may yield under that, for I see he is of a sensitive, nervous temperament."

"Only the torture! is there no other chance?"

"No. I am sure Christianity is a magical influence, and when it once gets the ascendancy there is no chance of conquering by persuasion; sometimes, not often, the torture causes them to yield, but they often die of broken hearts afterwards, or give themselves up voluntarily and renewing their obstinacy, perish miserably."

"Do not talk of it any longer," said Cornelius, "let us change the subject, but tell me, since

Eteocles is really guilty, how is it I see him now crossing the park?"

"He is to deliver himself up to-morrow at midday. I shall give special directions for the treatment of his case, I shall not, of course, be at the basilica in person."

It was sunset, and Eteocles was conquering the last ascent of a range of hills to the north-west of the villa. He stopped at the summit to rest, just as the sun was sinking in the west; light and fleecy clouds floated overhead, but the mountain tops around Mount Casius, were surmounted by clouds of the most gorgeous crimson hue; and the pure azure of the mid-regions of the skies seemed to fade imperceptibly into the delicious purple atmosphere which clothed the western peaks beneath which the dying orb was sinking.

The Orontes beneath appeared blood-red, as it reflected the evening sky; the towers and palaces of Antioch glowed in the light; the scene was enchanting, and the weary boy gazed upon it with rapture.

"What must Paradise then be," he muttered, "Oh mother, dear mother, I shall soon be there with you, and you will find your boy did not forget your lessons, or the way by which he was to follow you!"

And yet, there was a certain kind of sadness in the thought that it was perhaps the last evening he should ever see, the last time he should ever be free to gaze upon the fair earth which God had decked with such beauty.

Beyond the summit of the hill the path he was

following dipped again, and then gently rising entered a wood which clothed the sides of the mountain; before he had travelled many minutes he saw a light, he quickened his steps, and knocked at the door of a small hut, like a shepherd's cottage.

It was opened by a venerable man whose appearance bespoke the Christian priest; he saluted Eteocles warmly, and led him within; it was the priest, Cyril.

"But where is Æmilius?" said Eteocles as he looked around with a disappointed face, "they told me he was here."

"He was here this morning, and at mid-day a message came from the bishop, who wished to see him, so he departed."

"How far is it? where is the bishop?"

"Many miles away, in the north of his diocese; Æmilius will hardly reach him to-night."

Eteocles hung his head and then covered it with his hands, between which some unbidden tears forced themselves.

"I did wish to see him before I die," said he, sorrowfully, "and now we shall never meet in this world."

"What is the matter, my dear boy?" said the priest, "why do you weep? what do you mean by saying you wished to see him before you die?"

"I have promised to give myself up to the legatus, at mid-day to-morrow."

The priest immediately questioned him, and soon learned the whole state of affairs.

And gently he strove to lead the thoughts of the young Greek to that Lord, in Whom alone could he hope for strength, and to banish the sadness which the disappointment had caused.

As they sat and the priest gazed upon the fair delicate form of the youth, and then thought of the rack, the amphitheatre, he could hardly contain himself.

"How long, O Lord, how long," he thought, "wilt Thou permit this? how long shall the souls under the Altar cry to Thee in vain? When the aged such as I perish it is well, but these, the very lambs of Thy flock! O Lord save them, and yet Thou didst make infants to glorify Thee by their death."

Let the reader but try to make an effort to realize the situation, let him imagine one whom he loves thus doomed, and he can appreciate this momentary burst of human nature, but it was exceptional amongst these warriors of the Cross. What the deadly breach is to the soldier, that was the arena to the primitive Christian; they envied rather than pitied those who suffered, and this feeling became rapidly uppermost in the priest Cyril; lovingly and tenderly he supported the young martyr in this his night of preparation for the trial; he received his last confession, and the Precious Blood was applied through the Ministry of Reconciliation to cleanse away all stain, and fit the soul for its final conflict.

He resigned his own couch to the boy and prayed all night, while Eteocles slept; once he looked upon him, and the face of the sleeper was calm and placid as that of a little child: once again he looked, and a happy expression passed over the face, while the dreamer said,—

"No, dear mother, I was never alone, the Lord was with me to the end."

"Yes," said the listening priest, "and He will

ever be with thee, dearest boy, when thou passest through the floods He will ever be near, and He will be thy portion for ever; Oh, that my crown were as near as thine."

The morning broke: at day-break the priest celebrated the Holy Mysteries, and Eteocles received his Lord; then, fortified with this celestial strength, they went on their way. After an hour or two, Antioch lay before them, and they parted, the priest fondly blessing the young Soldier of the Cross, and turning oft to catch the last lingering glimpse of a form he might never behold again in this world, but which he trusted to recognise in heaven.

Eteocles went on his way alone, with firm step, all irresolution was gone, he felt quite composed and happy; now and then the flesh asserted itself, and the nerves quivered as the thought of torture forced itself upon the imagination, but the soul asserted its supremacy, and all was well, the body had to yield.

It wanted yet a few minutes to mid-day when he stood before the basilica, a crowd was present, and the shriek of some criminal undergoing the question penetrated the air: Eteocles saw an officer of the court amongst the crowd, he walked forward boldly, and desired to be led to the magistrates. His wish was granted at once, for he was recognised.

CHAPTER X.

THE BASILICA.

THE basilica of Antioch, or as we should now say, the town hall, was a building with double colonnades situated in the forum, and used for the administration of justice.

In Antioch, as an important province, the civil and military authority rested alike with the legatus, ordinary cases of civil law were left to the local magistrates, but offences against religion, especially when they took the form of Christianity, were reserved for the Roman authorities.

And on this occasion Numerian had deputed one of his favourite officers, Victorinus, lieutenant of the Roman Legion, to superintend the examination of Eteocles, giving him such instructions as he thought most likely to accomplish the object he aimed at, the preservation of the life of the boy at the expense of his faith.

The basilica was about a hundred feet in length ; galleries and seats arranged after the fashion of stalls in a cathedral, or college chapel, ran round three sides of it, the upper end contained the platform where Victorinus sat surrounded by his guard, the silver eagle resting above the judgment seat.

In the centre of the area was an array of imple-

ments which might well have made an ordinary man shudder.

There was the rack with its cords and pulleys, the *flagra* and *scorpio*, whips loaded with lead or jagged iron, while a brazier stood by containing lighted charcoal, wherein pincers, with the *ungula* and *pecten*, to tear the quivering flesh, were heated to a white heat.

In the midst of this diabolical assortment stood the tormentors, clad in leather garments, wearing masks.

They led Eteocles to the steps of the platform, and he stood before his judge.

"Your name, my boy?" said the lieutenant.

"Eteocles."

"Are you free, or in slavery?"

"I have but recently received my freedom."

"Oh, I have heard of you before, you saved your late master's villa from the banditti, and thereby gained great praise from good citizens, which I trust you are not now about to forfeit. On what charge does he appear here?" turning to the *scriba*.

"He refuses to sacrifice, and professes himself a Christian."

"Oh, this can be soon settled," said Victorinus, "it must be a mere scandal. See, Eteocles, here is the statue of Jupiter, before it is a thurible with lighted charcoal, scatter the incense, a little incense, from the vessel at the side, upon the flame, and you may depart."

"My lord, I cannot," said Eteocles, "I do not believe in Jupiter."

"It does not matter, no one wants you to believe in him. Rome troubles herself about no man's belief, only about what he does, and provided the

hand lifts the incense, in a mechanical way, and drops it into the flame, she does not trouble whether the man believes in one god or a thousand, 'tis a mere act of obedience, the test of a good citizen."

"My lord," said Eteocles, "I cannot do it; it would be a denial of my Faith."

"But do you owe no allegiance to the Emperor? Can one so right-minded as you are refuse to obey Cæsar?"

"I can only render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God those that are God's. I pray for the Emperor, I obey him in all that does not conflict with my duty to a higher power."

"Foolish boy," said Victorinus, "then there is but one resource left, turn round and behold the implements in the centre of the court; you, Davus, there, explain their uses."

Eteocles turned round and gazed; he became pale and trembled, but by a vigorous effort overcame the quivering flesh; he had quite recovered his composure when he again faced his judge.

"You will be wise now, and yield," said Victorinus, "you must yield sooner or later, yours is not the form to resist such persuasions."

"It is not I who have to resist, it is my Lord Who resists in me."

"Davus," said the judge to one of the tormentors, "bring hither that torch; now try, boy, whether you can resist, place your hand in the flame."

Without one moment's hesitation Eteocles obeyed; the flesh cracked and shrunk, a faint smoke ascended from the burning member; the face of the boy worked convulsively, and drops of sweat stood like beads on his forehead, but he endured, till his judge cried,—

"Remove the torch. Is the physician here? Antenor stand by the criminal; try mild remedies first, but he *must* give way, you know what is needed,"

They led him to the rack, and divested him of his upper garments, and laid him thereon: by a simple mechanical contrivance, the joints of the victim were wrenched from their sockets, and the agony was grievous.

The physician kept his finger upon the pulse, to judge by the vital action how much agony the frame could safely bear, and now he made a sign to the tormentors to cease.

The face of Eteocles was deadly pale, his lips moved as in prayer.

Victorinus now addressed him.

"You feel now some of the torments which await you unless you yield, and obey the edict; shall I bid them release you?"

"I am a Christian," gasped the sufferer.

"Spare yourself this torment and us this folly."

"There was no further answer, and the tormentors again put the rack in operation, but Eteocles had borne all he could, he fainted.

"Remove him to the prison," said Victorinus, "to-morrow we trust he will have learned wisdom."

They poured water over him, and revived him to consciousness and pain at the same time, after which he was removed to the prison.

The prison was attached to the government buildings, and consisted of two parts; the first was entered from the prætorium, and was somewhat in the form of an atrium or hall, out of which on each side cells opened; there was an inner prison, called the *lignum*, far worse than this; it had no window

or outlet, except the door opening from the outer prison, and when this was closed the darkness was intense, and the atmosphere polluted; around the walls were little cells, traversed by a beam at the height of two feet from the ground, with a moveable ring of iron, to which the prisoners were secured.

There was yet a worse abode,—the *barathrum*, or pit, opening from a trap-door in the floor of the lignum, or second prison. Into this hideous den the victims were sometimes hurled alive, and killed by the fall; sometimes confined to perish or rot from fever or other disease, for it was the cesspool of the prison; sometimes to be removed to the rack or the amphitheatre.

The ordinary place after the examination for criminals was the inner prison—the lignum, and here Eteocles was transferred from the basilica, and left in utter darkness and stench to meditate upon his position, and, as the heathen said, "to learn wisdom."

In agony and darkness there he passed the night, but his Lord was with him, and peace reigned in his soul; not once did the thought suggest itself of seeking deliverance by apostacy. He knew that on the morrow he would be taken again before his judges, and that he would be called upon to make his decision; he had no longer any fear upon this point; he had been so marvellously strengthened to bear the trial of the day now past, that he felt that the Lord in Whom he trusted would be with him to the end. There were moments when glimpses of coming glory filled him with joy unspeakable; instances, too, in which nature asserted her supremacy—the lower nature so soon to be dissolved.

The morrow came, and the guards entered; he was taken to the basilica; it was crowded with spec-

tators ; Cornelius and Eucrates were there. Numerian presided in person, partly from interest in the boy, partly out of compliment to Cornelius, the honour of whose house was somewhat concerned.

The youthful appearance of Eteocles, and his pale but composed features, made an obvious impression on the people in his favour. Cornelius looked at him with intense anxiety, Eucrates with a cold calculating glance ; he had only been restrained by fear of his uncle from being present to gladden his eyes with the sight of the torture of the yesterday, now he could affect sympathy if observed.

The legatus fixed his eye upon the boy with a compassionate glance, and seemed to be trying to analyse the expression of his features, as if he sought to know whether he should obtain the result he desired after all the pain and suffering of the last twenty-four hours.

The charge was again read, with the additional clause that, being brought before the authorities, Eteocles, the former slave of Cornelius, had refused to worship the gods, or comply with the terms of the edict.

"Eteocles," said the legatus, "you hear the charge, and doubtless you have learned wisdom. The severities used towards you were not used in cruelty, in proof of which I have to inform you that the rights of Roman citizenship will be offered you if you set the example of obedience, and that your late master purposes to adopt you as his son."

A murmur of interest was heard amongst the crowd.

"My lord," said Eteocles, with a calm, sweet voice, "I thank you, and I thank Cornelius with all my heart for his goodness to me, but I have found

my own True Lord, in Whom I have the adoption, whereby I claim God as my Father, and eternal happiness as my portion."

"We have no time to waste," said the legatus, "the alternative is a painful and lingering death, to which I regret to condemn one so young and once so worthy. I can only put you the plain question,—will you sacrifice?"

"My lord, I cannot."

"Are you prepared to face the penalty?"

"I am, by His help in Whom I can do all things."

There was a pause of a few minutes, during which the legatus consulted with the assessors around him, after which the præco, or herald, read the sentence amidst the silence of the crowd.

"*Eteocles, a rebellious and senseless youth, who refuses to obey the edict of the divine emperor, is hereby sentenced to be taken back to the prison, to be thrown into the barathrum for three days, and at the end of that time burned alive in the public amphitheatre, that the people may learn the fate which awaits those who contemn the authority of the gods.*"

He heard this fearful sentence without emotion, meekly crossing his arms.

"Oh, Christ," he said, "Thou Who wast crucified for me, for Thy dear sake I accept this fate, and thank Thee that Thou hast counted me worthy to suffer for Thy Name."

The crowd dispersed without indulging in the execrations they generally heaped upon the Christians, and all through Antioch, in every tavern and place of public resort, the conversation turned upon the boy, the beauty of his countenance, and his fortitude; and many bets were interchanged upon the question of his endurance to the end.

But Cornelius sought the legatus and accompanied him home.

"You cannot mean to carry out this horrible sentence," he said.

"Surely I hope not, but following the plan we devised, I hoped by the very severity of the sentence, to appal him, and thereby save him."

"It is useless, I know it is," said Cornelius, "and he will die; magic, or whatever it is, he will not give way. Let me make one earnest appeal,—mitigate the sentence—spare him the barathrum, at least."

"If you give up the hope of saving him I will do so and more; he shall be in comfort till the end, and all shall be remitted but the stake, on the ground of the service he rendered in the case of the banditti, who, by the bye, must be Christians or magicians themselves, they disappeared so suddenly from the pursuit of the troops whom I sent to surprise them."

"But about this poor boy,—may I see him now, and do all I can? and then, if I fail, may I tell him I have secured him comfort to the end, so far as there is comfort in captivity?"

"You may; a cell shall be found for him, where he may have, at least, light and air, with a decent couch, for the three days of life yet remaining; but I trust we shall save him yet."

Cornelius simply replied, "I will try," and sought the victim.

They were alone more than an hour; when Cornelius came out the tears were yet in his eyes, and he strove in vain to conceal them; sorrowfully and sadly he bent his course towards home.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ORACLE.

T was just night-fall, and the shadows had fallen upon the haunt of the banditti in the forest. They were engaged in preparing their evening meal, and while some were busy in cooking the viands, others were stretched upon the grass, taking repose after the fashion described at their first introduction to the reader.

They were diminished in numbers, for the accessions they constantly received from fugitive slaves, did not compensate for their recent heavy losses, particularly severe in the defeat of their attempt upon the villa of Melissa.

Added to this, their recent depredations and daring incursions had effectually roused the wrath of the legatus, who had set a price upon their heads, and offered large rewards with free pardon to any deserter who would betray the retreat of the band.

Reclining before the fire, lay the unfortunate Juba; he was greatly changed in appearance, the horrors of that day upon the cross had seriously affected his health, and his strong constitution had with difficulty sustained the ravages of the fever which had ensued.

He was now convalescent, his strength was re-

turning, and with it, the evil passions which the cruelty of his master had first aroused.

The captain of the band drew near.

"How are you to-night, boy? is appetite returning yet? the venison gives forth a savoury odour which might well tempt you."

"I can eat now," said Juba, "and I hope I shall soon be strong enough to make some return for the risk and loss you have incurred through me."

"All in good time, boy; do you know that your tyrant has left the villa with his mother, and is living safely in Antioch."

"He had better take care how he trusts himself in the woods."

"He will take care of that, at least for the present, but we shall not give him any more trouble just now, we have aroused such a swarm of hornets that we must shift our quarters and try some other neighbourhood; to-morrow we shall move southward for a time."

"Then he will escape altogether."

"For a time; when they have forgotten us we shall meet them again; but here is supper, you must fortify yourself against the morrow."

In silence the banditti devoured their food, their spirits were depressed by a run of ill-luck and their usual animation had gone.

While they were thus engaged, a sudden cry caused every man to start to his feet; the next instant the sentinel who had raised the alarm, rushed into the assembly, and gave the information that a large band of soldiers, (a centurion and his whole company, he supposed,) was at hand.

Any permanent opposition was hopeless, and the band knew at once what steps to take, the fire was

scattered in all directions, and the robbers were already making their exit on the opposite side when the soldiers appeared, and a flight of darts and arrows quickened the pace of the fugitives.

While the soldiers were striving to find the path of pursuit, the banditti retreated with all the speed in their power; they crossed the strip of forest which separated them from the base of the mountain, and approached the brink of the awful chasm before mentioned.

Here the delay became the cause of sickening anxiety, for the fugitives could only swing themselves over the abyss, one by one, and in their frenzied effort, one lost his hold, and fell into the gulf below; they heard his body strike the rocks from side to side, and at last a loud splash told the end.

The captain, daring as the Thracian robber who confronted Alexander, waited till the last; the pursuers drew nearer, they had found the track, their eager cries resounded through the woods, but only the leader and one individual remained.

"After you," said the captain.

"Let me be the last," said the other.

The captain well understood this move, he had received secret information that this man was a traitor, and had already prepared to dispose of him. The unhappy wretch had in vain endeavoured to escape during the brief retreat, for the stern eye of his leader, who bore a ready dart in his hand, had restrained him. And now that leader's measures were prompt and decided, he struck the traitor one fearful blow, so sudden, and unexpected, that losing his balance, the unhappy wretch tumbled into the gulf behind him, while

the captain swung himself over the abyss in safety.

The branches had regained their natural position, when the pursuers reached the spot and gazed about them in utter bewilderment; the means by which the robbers had escaped, were utterly beyond their comprehension, they had depended upon the personal guidance of the traitor.

The band reached the mouth of the cave, where they were confronted by the priestess.

"What seek ye here?" she cried.

"Shelter, good mother," replied the captain.

"You cannot enter here, the gods are unpropitious."

"We have no choice, mother, the foe is behind and occupies the hollow; we *must* find refuge."

"Then enter, but remember I have warned you."

They entered, a large fire was kindled in the cave, which was very large, and the genial warmth soon raised the spirits of the band, the more that stores of wine and food were not wanting."

"Here," said the captain, "we may stand a siege for any length of time; our enemies will search in vain for an entrance to the citadel. Good mother, we owe you many thanks, and you shall receive much reward for your hospitality, if the gods but prosper us."

"Prepare to avert their wrath by victims and sacrifices; I tell you they are angry."

The band shuddered at the tone in which she spoke.

"She is out of spirits," said their leader. "Mother, we shall not long intrude upon you."

"I do not speak in my own name, but the

deities have warned me that there is wrath in store; provoke them not by tarrying in their shrine."

"We cannot help it, mother, and I will sacrifice a hecatomb to atone for the liberty."

The wearied banditti were speedily asleep, Juba amongst them. He had slept some hours, as it seemed to him, when his dreams assumed such a portentous character that he awoke terrified; it seemed that a fearful incubus was upon him,—a hideous spell,—a nightmare he could not shake off.

Suddenly he felt a cold hand upon his face, a strange mist pervaded the cavern, and through it he dimly discerned the face of the priestess bending over him.

"Arise," she said.

He felt himself lifted from the ground, but he could hardly stand, he was so giddy and sick; she led him into the fresh air, he stumbled and almost fell down the declivity into the defile, but she supported him.

"Lean upon the rock," she said, "thou hast had a narrow escape, the sickness will soon pass away."

He looked at her face, she was pale and haggard beyond conception; leaving him, she returned and strove, but strove in vain, to rouse the others; from the recess at the end of the cavern, there was an orifice leading far downward into the bowels of the earth, and from thence the voice of the oracle occasionally gave its responses; now a thin smoke seemed to arise, and it was this poisonous vapour which had prostrated the band.

Utterly unable to save *them*, the priestess was forced to save *herself*, for she could no longer endure the vitiated atmosphere. She rejoined Juba; he was still giddy, and unable to move.

"I know not why thou art a favourite of the gods," she said, "but the fact is plain; this awful night I had fallen asleep like the others, when the voice of the deity aroused me: 'Save thyself and the lad,' it said, and I heard no more. Alas! for the others; but I warned them."

"Can we not save them, too?" said he, "at least let us try; I have promised to guard their lives as mine own."

"Thou wilt try in vain; they sleep their last sleep."

How that night passed would be difficult to describe; in the dim light of the stars, the precipice above them, the chasm beneath them, a thin smoke ever issuing from the mouth of the cavern, they waited upon the ledge of rock, hardly daring to stir until the light of dawn penetrated the reft.

"Now follow me," said the priestess.

She led him by a most difficult path, passing the mouth of the cavern, where she would not suffer one moment's pause; climbing by steps cut in the solid rock, here and there grasping bushes to steady the footsteps, until the path became broader, at last, after an hour's hard toil, they gained the summit of the mountain.

Descending on the other side, they paused upon a platform of rock which overhung a narrow path leading along a rocky ravine. Before they had waited long they heard the sound of voices.

"They are coming," she said; "it is a caravan of merchants bound to the far east; there, beyond the deserts, lie thy future fortunes; offer the merchants thy services, and fear not. Farewell! our paths will never cross again, but the prophecies concerning thee await their accomplishment, and hence thou wert preserved."

"Mother," said he, "do not leave me; I have no one else in the world now."

But she was gone, as if by enchantment, and he only caught a glimpse of her white robe as it vanished behind some distant shrubs higher up the hill.

Meanwhile the sound of voices grew more distinct, and soon a singular cavalcade appeared,—merchants leading asses laden with merchandize, themselves dressed in Syrian costume, and heavily armed, while behind, slaves seemed to be leading other asses laden with provisions, and bearing leathern water bottles.

Juba knew at once that they were smugglers, who avoided the beaten tracks in order to escape the taxes the Roman government levied on commerce with the east. He would have hesitated to trust himself to them, but he knew they were leaving the country where he was no longer safe, and that their profession would keep them out of the way of the Roman authorities; so, following the line of action pointed out by the priestess, he descended, and stood in their path, awaiting their approach.

When the foremost reached the boy he paused, and a merchant, who appeared to possess the chief authority amongst these "Ishmaelites," came forward.

"What dost thou seek, boy?" he asked.

"Employment, and permission to accompany you across the desert as your servant."

"Thou art a runaway slave."

"And you are smugglers."

"Well said, boy; we are alike in our defiance of Roman law; fall in behind; Sosia there has two

asses to lead, take the bridle of one; we will give you food at our first halt."

Juba fell behind; they halted at a spring and took their meal, then traversed a wooded mountainous country until, from the summit of the last eminence, the sands of the desert appeared. Here they halted for the night.

On the morrow they entered the desert, and by degrees the blue hills of Syria faded from sight, and one monotonous scene—the sand, the sand—occupied the whole field of vision.

But before the last glimpse of the country he had left faded from sight, Juba looked back and gazed intently upon the outline of its hills.

"Shall I ever see it again?" he said. "Oh! if my dreams, if the vision I beheld only come true!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE MARTYR.

THE shades of evening were falling fast on the brow of the hill where Eteocles had sought the priest, Cyril, in the hope of meeting his beloved Æmilius; it was the first of the three days allotted to the young champion of the Cross, ere the final and deadly conflict in the amphitheatre.

Another traveller was now approaching the humble habitation of the priest, and from the opposite direction; he looked travel-stained and foot-sore, but hastened so as to thread the intricacies of the path through the copse, ere the black clouds which were gathering in the horizon had wholly obscured the light.

He found his goal without difficulty, and knocked at the door; receiving no answer he entered and beheld the priest standing in such deep meditation as not to notice his approach; but suddenly recovering life and energy, he recognized the intruder, and saluted him warmly.

"I am indeed rejoiced to see you, my dear son," he said, "the more so as I have important news to communicate."

Æmilius looked at him eagerly; his lips moved but he did not speak.

"Eteocles was here the night after you left," he replied; "He came to see you, and to bid you farewell."

"Farewell! where is he going?"

"A long but a very happy journey, although the road is a weary one."

"Father, tell me at once, do not torture me."

"My dear boy, you ought to rejoice at the news. He is a prisoner: he was apprehended by the legatus in person at your father's villa; Numerian listened to his earnest request for liberty for one more day only; he asked for it, that he might come to see you; he came, and sadly grieved to miss you, partook of the Holy Mysteries, and returned on the morrow, to deliver himself up at the basilica."

"And I was not here," said Æmilius. He utterly gave way and wept.

The priest did not interrupt him for a time; he thought it well to let nature have her course, but when at last Æmilius rose and stepped towards the door, he arrested his progress.

"Where are you going, my son?"

"To Antioch."

"For what purpose?"

"Eteocles shall not die alone; I will share his cross and his crown."

"My dear Æmilius, remember, the canons of the Church forbid us to give up ourselves voluntarily, thereby causing the heathen to sin; the death of your friend would be a *martyrdom*, and yours an act of *suicide*."

He sank back on his chair, and covered his face with his hands; at last he looked up.

"Have you any news from Antioch?"

"Yes; he bore the torments bravely, and they

could not overcome him, either by entreaty or force, so finally he was condemned to die; he was to have been confined in the barathrum, (Æmilius shuddered,) but at the earnest entreaty of your father ('God bless him,' said Æmilius,) the whole of his sentence is to be remitted excepting the final clause; he is to suffer by fire in the amphitheatre."

Æmilius clasped his hands.

"And I shall never see him again."

"Yes, my son, you may: the gaoler who has charge of the cells in the prætorium where he is confined, is a Christian, and he retains his office solely on account of the services we can render our brethren in captivity through his means. To-morrow you shall visit your friend, if you will only observe proper precautions and consent to disguise yourself."

"I will do anything you wish so that I may but see him again."

"And I shall commit a mighty burden to you, the greatest you have ever yet borne; it shall be yours to convey to him the Sacred Mysteries, which you must guard as your own life."

"As my own life, indeed," said Æmilius; "cold would be my love, could I do otherwise. Oh, father, you have made me so happy; I shall bear him the strength he needs, so that it may be first Jesus on earth, and then Jesus in Heaven."

"And now, my son, you must rest. I shall call you at sunrise that we may join with the brethren in pleading the Great Sacrifice for his especial needs, and then you shall depart so as to reach him in the evening before the prison is closed; it will be his last evening, and I shall not fail to follow you with my prayers."

They committed themselves to God in prayer, rose from their knees and retired to rest.

Before the morning sun had gilded the skies they left the cottage for a little church concealed in the solitude of the wood, where a few poor Christians, herdsmen and shepherds, assembled in secresy and silence to plead the Great Sacrifice once offered on Calvary, in the way their Lord had appointed, and to kneel in his Sacramental Presence with adoring awe.

It was a very touching service,—the service of the Church in her poverty: no music pealed through vaulted aisles, the vestments were of simple white linen, but *there* beneath that humble roof was that Human Nature, with Its affections and sympathies, Its unbounded Love, and Its power to save; and from that Mighty Presence the martyr might gain strength, and the mourner comfort.

The service was at length ended, the ablutions taken, the sacred vessels cleansed, the priest then deposited a portion of the Bread of Life within a golden pyx which he carefully closed, and then committed It to the care of Æmilius, who knelt on the lower step.

"See," he said, "the Creator trusts Himself to the care of the creature; guard the Treasure thou bearest and It will guard thee; let thy inmost heart be pure and each thought guarded, that thou mayest worthily entertain the Mighty Guest thou hast thyself received, Who dwelleth within thee and yet without thee."

Æmilius pressed the Precious Treasure to his lips, folded the pyx in a silken scarf, and deposited It beneath the tunic next to his breast, then he departed in silence.

As he went he thought of the martyr before whom the Unveiled Presence was about to manifest Itself, and he envied his friend.

"But I am unworthy," he thought, "utterly unworthy to die like him. Will it ever be my lot? Oh, that the struggle could end now."

He drew near the city, crossed the Orontes, and landed upon the quay. He wore the dress of the Syrian peasant and a cap which partially concealed his features; he knew he was in danger of being discovered amongst the crowd; once his heart beat as he saw Eucrates pass on the opposite side of the way beneath the colonnade, but it was for the Treasure he bore, not for himself, he feared. He reached the prætorium; it was evening, and the sun was near its setting, the business of the day was transacted, and the prætorium left to its guards.

He asked for Drusillus, the gaoler, and was directed to a porter's lodge before the entrance to the prison.

Drusillus looked keenly at him as he approached and signified his wish to see the prisoner.

"Whose authority have you?"

"That of the priest Cyril," said he in a low tone.

"Hush," said the gaoler, "your token."

Æmilius showed the pyx.

The man crossed himself. "Follow me," he said, "you have barely an hour."

He led the way through several passages, and at last stopped before the door of a cell in that part of the building generally appropriated to the use of the gaolers, to which the mercy of Numerian had consigned the martyr.

The lock turned, the door opened, and the friends were together. The disguise did not conceal Æmi-

lius from Eteocles: they embraced fervently, the tears were in their eyes, and for a moment neither could speak.

It was a rectangular cell of small dimensions; behind the door was a plain couch, with a mattress and coverlet; the window, closely barred, was opposite and admitted the last rays of the sun; there was a stool, a common table; this was all the room afforded, but it was in great contrast to barathrum, lignum, or even the outer prison before described.

His recent sufferings from torch and rack had rendered Eteocles pale, and his nerves were weak, but Æmilius had never seen him look so happy. He drew forth the pyx in silence, and placed it upon the table; they both fell on their knees before it, and adored in silence, with emotions of gratitude and love which in these colder days can seldom be conceived.

Then the prayer of "bowing down," for worthy reception, was said, and Æmilius as deputed for that office, gave the Blessed Sacrament to Eteocles; he received with tears of joy, and after a Psalm of Thanksgiving, Æmilius restored the pyx to his bosom.

The hour was rapidly passing away, and at last Æmilius broke the silence.

"I can hardly think, dear Eteocles, that this is your last night, and that to-morrow I shall be alone without him who brought me to know my God. It is hard to bear." He could hardly utter the last words.

"Do you then envy me my crown, dear Æmilius? Oh, think, only think that to-morrow at this time I shall be in Paradise, only to-morrow; oh, I can hardly contain my joy; I shall see Him Whom my soul loveth, and in His dear Presence await you."

"You do not fear the stake, then? He has taken all fear away!"

"All; I have *no* fear, only joy and hope. Oh! Æmilius, last night I saw my mother!"

"You have never told me about her."

"No; at one time I could not bear to do so. She died a martyr for our Lord; I was her only child, and she a widow, and she loved me so dearly; not one morning or evening did she omit my name in her prayers; not one opportunity did she omit of teaching me to love the dear Lord Who was her only strength; together we received the Holy Mysteries, and in the presence of the same Mighty Guest both mother and boy were so happy; our lives were like a summer day, until a local persecution broke out in the lovely island of the Archipelago where we lived; she was denounced to the judges, and they exposed her to the beasts. I was very young, and they spared me that they might sell me for a slave, but forced me to be present. When she parted from me she embraced me, oh! so fondly; 'My dear child,' she said, 'it is only a few years, very few, and we shall meet; you know the path whereby to rejoin me.' She blessed me as they tore me from her in spite of my grief, and they took me to the amphitheatre, and forced me to look when the leopard made his final spring. I have never forgotten that moment,—her last look of love which I caught distinctly!"

Here he paused; his emotion was too great for words; at last he resumed:

"And last night I saw her again; it was no dream; her happy spirit was permitted to clothe itself in the semblance of the mortality she once wore. 'Dear child,' she said, 'thou hast kept the Faith; thou hast

trodden the path, and within two days thou shalt be with thy mother in the joy of thy Lord.' "

"Oh! mother, mother," he continued, "even here on earth, before I meet you again, never again to part, I thank you for those prayers you have never ceased to pour for me; I thank you now, but how shall I thank you to-morrow!"

"Oh! that I could be with you to-morrow," said Æmilius; "Oh! that I could die, too; I cannot survive you."

"You *must* wait patiently till He calls; the longest life is a span compared to eternity. But we shall meet again, I know we shall, and you will be called to glorify Him by your death in His own good time."

"Pray for me; ever pray for me."

"I do; I will, till that happy day when you, my dear Æmilius, rejoin me; meanwhile bear all and endure all, and one moment of heaven will compensate for all the pangs the world or devil can inflict here."

The gaoler knocked at the door. The boys fondly embraced each other.

"One last request," said Eteocles. "Many Christians will be amongst the spectators to-morrow to pray for me to the last; you must be there, too."

"Oh! Eteocles, I cannot see you suffer."

"'Tis not suffering, 'tis triumph; if you see one impatient movement, hear one groan, pray for me all the more earnestly; but I do not think you will see the one or hear the other, for He Who has already stood by me when on the rack will be by me still."

"I will be there."

The gaoler entered: "The hour has quite expired; it is not safe to remain longer; the captain will be making his rounds."

They parted, and Æmilius followed the gaoler.

"You must not sob so," said the man gruffly but not unkindly, "you will arouse suspicion; as for your friend, he will be in Paradise to-morrow, so you need not weep for him."

Æmilius slept that night at the residence of the bishop in Antioch, a house known to all the Christians but carefully disguised, so that the heathen might not conjecture its occupant. The Bishop Fabius arrived that evening, and had a long conversation with him.

"It is manifest," he said, "that Syria is no longer a place for you; you are too well known, and you are in the midst of painful associations; to-morrow evening, after the triumph in the amphitheatre, a vessel sails from Seleucia for Rome; the captain is a Christian; he has undertaken to receive you, and to present you in safety to the new Bishop of Rome, who will afford you support and employment amongst the faithful of that mighty city. Of course there is danger there as well as here, but at this moment no country is free from danger to the Christian, if that which is the passport to eternal life can be called danger; in Rome, again, there are more opportunities of concealment than here, and the administration of the Holy Mysteries, and the other rites of the Church, our Mother, less impeded."

"I am at your disposal, father; do with me as you will; you know what is best for me."

"And now rest, my dear child, to-morrow you will need all your strength."

The morrow came; the sun rose upon Eteocles for the last time. He was removed at an early hour to a cell beneath the seats of the amphitheatre; at the same hour the bishop celebrated the Holy Mysteries.

Early in the morning the theatre was filled—filled almost to suffocation, but none of those introduced to the reader in the former description of its sports were there now, save Æmilius; even Eucrates dared not come, much as he wished to do so; he feared his uncle.

Towards the hour of terce—the third hour—according to Christian reckoning the hour when the King of Martyrs was brought forth to die,—the hour when the Holy Ghost descended at Pentecost,—the grating leading to the dungeons opened.

In the centre of the arena a stake had been firmly fixed in the ground; around it were heaped faggots of wood, upon which, owing to the mercy of the legatus, combustible material had been largely poured, so that a spark would kindle them, and the sufferings of the victim be short.

And now he appeared, and every eye was fixed upon him. Clad like Fidenatus in a simple white tunic, they led him to the stake; he kissed it fervently, an iron hoop was passed round his body, and secured by a staple to the wood, and all was ready.

He raised his eyes, and looked around; some in the crowd shouted in fierce accents, "Burn the atheist," and showered maledictions and curses upon him; others were subdued by his gentle bearing and forbore to blaspheme.

The legatus was in his seat, the crier commanded silence, and for the last time the chance of apostacy was proffered in vain.

"It is useless to delay longer," said the legatus; "let the pile be kindled."

The torch was applied by the tormentors, who stood around in their leather garments armed with pitchforks, and the flames rose instantly on all sides.

But through an opening Æmilius saw the face of his friend, and caught that glance which haunted him through life; it was so calm, so sweet; there was no contraction even of the features; God subdued the pain; no sigh, no cry of anguish issued from that martyr pile.

It was over, and they had nothing more that they could do.

The crowd dispersed and discussed the scene; they marvelled at the power of the magical spells. The legatus returned sorrowfully to his palace, immersed in thought. The Christians sang hymns of joy, for another victory was won.

A deep calm fell upon the spirit of Æmilius; he felt indeed that he had another treasure laid up in heaven; he thought of Eteocles; he pictured the meeting with his mother in the joy of the Lord; he seemed to hear the words, "well done thou good and faithful servant," and prayed that soon they might be spoken of him.

"Oh! when," he thought, "shall my toil be over? when shall I rest with him?"

He parted with calmness from the bishop, knelt to receive the last blessing, and took the road to Seleucia, riding over nearly the same ground described in the third chapter of this narrative, over which he had ridden before that memorable capture by the pirates which had led to his conversion, and he thanked God for Eteocles once more. He reached Seleucia without adventure, and found the ship on the point of sailing; all was provided for him, and he embarked.

As night drew near the towers and buildings of Seleucia disappeared, and the bold headlands of Syria faded by degrees until they were but indis-

tinctly visible; he walked upon the deck, and strained his gaze to catch the last glimpse of his native land; sunset came, twilight succeeded; Syria was lost to view.

Let the reader take his stand this day of the autumn of 251 upon the brow of Mount Hæmus, and gaze upon the fair plains of Thrace outstretched beneath. There is a little town named Abrutum, and the smoke of a conflagration ascends from it; but this is not the point of interest. Behold those mighty ranks encamped in front of the pass which rends the mountain beneath the gazer. These are the Goths; they have destroyed Philippolis and shed the blood of one hundred thousand inhabitants, men, women, and children, and now they are retreating to their own frozen soil.

But their road is barred, for in the mouth of the pass lies another army. They are not difficult to recognize; the eagles, all the insignia of a Roman army are there, and something more,—there is the Imperial standard, the Prætorian guard. Decius is there.

Listen now to the sounds from beneath. The mighty armies are drawn in array; the Goths strive to force their way into the pass, but Roman valour, though dying, is yet triumphant; they are repulsed. A second time they rush forward to be driven back more completely with fearful slaughter. They recoil, and the broken ranks reform behind the third division of the army, posted securely behind a morass; the Romans, flushed by success, attempt to force the position.

Now, behold, the scene has changed; the Goths

are triumphant; the Roman army has perished in the marsh, sunk in its depths, or destroyed by the barbarians.

But where is Decius? where is the persecutor? The marsh has swallowed him, and neither friend nor foe may ever gaze upon him more.

END OF PART I.

Æ M I L I U S:

Book the Second.

"What if to the trumpet's sound
Voices few come answering round,
Scarce a votary swells the burst
When the anthem peals at first.
God hath sown and he will reap;
Growth is slow where roots are deep."

Lyra Apostolica.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

ROME UNDER VALERIAN.

SEVEN years had passed away since the events we have previously narrated, and Valerian was firmly seated upon the imperial throne, when the action of our tale re-commences.

After Decius had fallen in battle with the Goths, the reins of empire were seized by Gallus, who bribed the enemy to forsake the territory they had overrun, consenting to leave in their hands the rich booty they had acquired, the prisoners they had taken, and promising to pay them annually a large sum of gold, upon condition that they should trouble him no more.

His effeminacy provoked further incursions, which were repressed effectually by Æmilianus, the governor of Mœsia, who was thereupon saluted emperor by the troops under his command. Gallus hastened to meet him, previously sending to bid his lieutenant, Valerian, to hasten to his aid with the legions of Gaul and Germany; but before the ar-

rival of Valerian the unfortunate Gallus encountered his rival, and was slain by his own troops, who proclaimed Æmilianus emperor.

Æmilianus had only reigned for the space of four months when Valerian arrived, too late to save his master, but not too late to avenge him. The troops of Æmilianus were awed by the reputation of his rival, and yet more so by the strength of his army; they murdered their late master, as they had murdered Gallus, and transferred their homage to Valerian.

Valerian began his reign with the approbation of mankind; he was affable, just, and generous, capable of warm attachment, and of generous emotions. Under his able rule the empire enjoyed unaccustomed tranquillity, until, under the instigation of a worthless favourite, Macrianus, the prætorian prefect, he consented to persecute the Christians.

Every argument was used to overcome his reluctance. The heathen priests asserted that their oracles were dumb, and that the gods would not accept the victims offered in sacrifice, because the Christians were suffered to exist. Every earthquake or pestilence was interpreted as a token of divine anger against those who tolerated the atheists, as the Christians were falsely styled; and at last Valerian yielded, and a most severe edict was framed for the suppression of Christianity.

Bishops, priests, and deacons were to suffer without the chance of recantation being offered them; senators and knights were to lose their dignities and possessions, and furthermore their lives, if they refused to conform, while those of inferior rank who had once embraced Christianity were to perish

under severe tortures unless they recanted, and even then slavery was to be their portion.

This edict was first published in April, A.D. 257, and S. Stephen, Bishop of Rome, and many others, suffered immediately; but the persecution grew far more fierce in the following year, when that glorious martyr S. Cyprian suffered at Carthage, and the whole Roman world was the scene of the persecution.

We must take the liberty granted to tale tellers, and introduce the reader without danger to the innermost recesses of the palace of the emperor. It was an apartment of small dimensions, but furnished in the most luxurious manner which can be conceived. Two persons were seated therein engaged in an animated conversation. The one, by the majesty of his mien and the look of command which sat upon his features, was evidently the emperor himself. He was of noble and dignified bearing; the grey locks which crowned his head (for he was more than sixty years of age) added the appearance of wisdom, while the bare spot where the helmet had checked their growth testified to experience gained in actual military service. There was nothing harsh or repulsive in his bearing; he looked like one who might justly be styled "the Father of the people;" and it was on behalf of some of his disobedient children that he was condescending to plead with Macrianus, the creature of his will, yet, by the influence he had established over the emperor, the truer ruler of the State.

"I grant all that you say," said Valerian, "and the gods forbid that I should shrink from my duty, but has not blood enough been shed?"

"There are rumours of barbarian incursions on

every side; the Goths are in Mœsia again, and they have taken to ship building, so that their fleets press our colonies on the shores of the Euxine; on every side we hear of calamities, and above all in the east, where Sapor has become the very scourge of Rome."

The speaker was a tall, thin, dark man of olive complexion, with nothing of the Roman about him. There was much in his countenance which spoke of duplicity and hypocrisy to one accustomed to read the character in the face; yet he had a soft and insinuating manner which found its way to the heart of Valerian.

"The gods forbid," he continued, "that I should urge upon you any deeds of cruelty to stain the annals of your glorious reign, but I wish to recall two or three facts to your memory. When this pestilent religion, which they call Christianity, first arose, the empire was at the zenith of its glory; since then we have seen reverses succeed each other, until the very nations which formerly licked the dust under our feet now despise the name of Roman."

"No," said the emperor, "not despise."

"Pardon me, my liege, I will proceed: remember that thirty emperors have reigned since this sect first made its appearance in the days of Tiberius, and only six have escaped the hands of murderers; must not this be the vengeance of the gods?"

"Decius persecuted Christianity, and how did he die?"

"He died in battle, indeed, but may we not find a sufficient reason? he did his work negligently; he permitted Christians to elude the law by pretended conformity,—by scattering a few grains of

incense, or even by signing papers testifying falsely that they had done so."

"I cannot be accused of negligence," said Valerian; "but yet I shrink from the task imposed on me; the tortures inflicted have exceeded anything the worst malefactors have borne in former times; men have been torn by the hooks, pierced and cut by knives, until there was no part of the body unmangled, and then thrown upon hot coals, or roasted upon gridirons; only a few days back I was present in disguise in the Æmilian basilica, and beheld a boy of only thirteen years of age suffer in this cruel manner."

"They do not suffer as we suppose, at least they *seem* not to do so. I lament the necessity for these hard measures, only the security of the many demands the punishment of the few, otherwise Rome must fall, which the gods forbid. Believe me, my noble master, I grieve thus to pain you; but I know you would sacrifice even your *own* life for the good of your subjects, and that you are but sacrificing your feelings of pity for the same reason now; it must be a brief struggle, 'tis half over, and you may soon erect a monument with the inscription, 'Christianity has been destroyed by Valerian.'"

"May the gods grant it, but, although I feel I must do my duty, I shrink from the task; and I have no hope of eventual success, the roots of this accursed superstition are too deep."

"Nay, my lord, there is every hope of success; information has been brought to me to-day that one of the underground cemeteries, in which these Christians hide themselves like rats in their holes, has been discovered, and furthermore, that the

bishop, as they call him, Xystus, the successor of that Stephen who so recently met the penalty of his crimes against the State, is about to celebrate their 'Mysteries,' whatever *they* may be, about day-break to-morrow; we shall stop up their holes and secure them."

"Yes, by all means; cut off the ringleaders but spare their followers, at least on this occasion; let the example of Xystus himself suffice."

"I fear it is false mercy, but it shall be as you desire; I am but your slave to execute your will; I live but to do that will."

"I know, Macrianus, you are a faithful servant both to me and the public; but now we must end this interview; I have to be present at a public sacrifice, for at least *we* must honour the gods."

"Always remember, my lord, the priests declare the Christians are the most acceptable victims."

"I do not forget it. Farewell."

And Macrianus departed, and took his way towards the Capitol, where he had a private interview with the pontifices.

The forum was crowded with spectators, as the emperor, attended by a magnificent retinue, went in person to the Capitol, where a public sacrifice was to be offered to Jupiter, to implore his aid against the barbarians, the offerer being a favourite general, whom Valerian was about to despatch into the east to contend with the Goths.

All that the most brilliant genius could achieve had been devoted to the embellishment of the forum; temples, basilicas, arches, columns, gladdened the eye in every direction. At the moment in question the populace of Rome crowded it; the steps of the temples, the pedestals whereon statues

were placed, the roofs of the buildings, were occupied by the multitude. As Valerian entered, passing along the Via Sacra, towards the Capitol, every eye was strained, until the gilded weapons of the prætorian guard were visible between the Curia Hostilia and the Comitium.

As he passed on his course towards the Arch of Severus, where the ascent of the Capitoline Hill commenced, his progress was one continual ovation, cries of "Long live the Emperor" were almost drowned in the more flattering cries which anticipated the day when Valerian should be enrolled amongst the gods after his decease. "Long live the God Valerian!" shouted his admirers; "Long live the scourge of the Christians,—the favourite of the gods!" shouted others, less profane.

Near the altar which marked the supposed site of the gulf which had closed in the centre of the Forum, when Curtius leaped in it with heroic self-devotion, as the tradition told, stood two individuals who merit particular notice: the one a young man of winning demeanour, and simple dress, who fixed the attention of the gazer by the indescribable dignity yet sweetness of his deportment; the other yet younger than he, in the first years of early manhood, possessing the marked features of the Roman and the patrician, tempered by an expression so prepossessing, as to win immediate confidence from those he addressed.

"Do you hear them, Laurence?" said the latter, "they call the Augustus, 'God;' what an awful sacrilege. A god who yet awaits death."

"Let us pray for them, that God, the true God, would enlighten their darkness, but we must follow, painful though it is to do so; it is important to see

the temper of the people on this occasion, I know their priests have deep designs."

On one of the summits of the Capitoline stood the citadel, on the other the great national temple, the Capitol itself, sacred to Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva; so often destroyed by fire, and now existing as finally restored by Domitian.

Passing beneath the arch of Severus, the procession from the forum turned to the left and ascended the slope; the guards kept back the multitude, who thronged behind; on the right hand was the beautiful Temple of Concord, founded by Camillus, when he had restored peace to Rome, after the Gallic invasion; and another building, the Tullianum, where Jugurtha had been lowered by his captors to perish in the barathrum; in which also the fellow conspirators of Catiline had been strangled by order of Cicero.

Laurence and his companion paused as the prison met their glance.

"The scene of the imprisonment of S. Peter," said the former, "how hallowed to us!"

"And yet the world reckoned him a fitting successor to Jugurtha and Lentulus," replied his companion.

"True, dear Æmilius, but the judgment will be reversed in Heaven; meanwhile what does not Rome owe to its apostle?"

"The emperor has reached the capitol, listen to those cries of applause."

"Follow me, quickly," said Laurence, and he led Æmilius behind the temple, and through a passage which brought them to a level terrace, commanding a view of the spectacle.

The emperor was not present as Pontifex Maxi-

mus, but simply as a spectator to signify his devotion to the gods, and also, alas, as a worshipper, who sought to know their will as manifested by the entrails of the victim.

Those who took a part in the ceremony had purified themselves by bathing in a running stream; they wore on their brows chaplets; the priests bearing the sacred band of white wool around their brows.

When all was ready, the *præco*, or crier, commanded silence in the words "*favete linguis*," the officers again washed their hands, veiled their heads, that no ill omened sight might reach their eyes, while the *tibicen*, or flute player, played a solemn strain to guard the ears.

The victim was a snow-white steer from the banks of the Clitumnus, and was adorned with flowers, its horns being previously gilded.

The assistants led it gently, without force, to the altar, a form of prayer was dictated by the pontifex, and repeated by the offerer; wine, incense, and flour, were sprinkled on its head; a few hairs cut off from between the horns, and thrown on the altar.

Then the *popa*, or butcher, exclaimed, "Shall I proceed?"

The pontifex replied, "Proceed," and the popa struck down the victim with a mallet, and then plunged a knife into the throat, receiving the blood in a basin, and pouring it upon the altar.

The victim was now cut up, and the *haruspex*, or omen interpreter, gazed upon the entrails in solemn silence.

He shook his head as though he feared to speak.

"The gods give no answer: they do not accept the sacrifice."

"Let another victim be offered," said the emperor.

The ceremony was renewed at the expense of another victim, but again the haruspex shook his head.

A third time the sacrifice was offered, and once more he appeared dissatisfied.

"What of the omens?" said Valerian.

"The gods are angry."

Then some one in the crowd, doubtless instigated by the priests of Jupiter, shouted, "Christianos ad leones."

The cry was taken up by the multitude with fierce energy: it was echoed back from the temples; it reached the Palatine, and made the imperial palace throw back the sound; it vibrated on the Quirinal; it crossed the river, and the waves of sound swept over the Janiculum; Rome took up the cry and repeated it from street to street.

The emperor heard it, and exclaimed, "It is the will of the gods; the voice of the people is their voice."

Laurence pressed the hand of Æmilius, and gazed into his face with a cheerful smile.

"We shall conquer," he said, "by suffering. It is a Fabian mode of conquest; but in God's own time."

"How long, O Lord, how long?" exclaimed Æmilius.

"So long as He pleases; and now we must descend."

They heard the shouts of the populace who cheered Valerian back along the Clivus Capitolinus,

and finally to the entrance of the imperial palace, which occupied the whole of the Palatine Hill. Meanwhile our two friends descended the Capitol by the side adjacent to the river, where a flight of one hundred steps, led to the base of the precipice, the famous Tarpeian rock, where criminals were precipitated headlong, in the days of the Republic.

It was a lovely August evening, and the gorgeous buildings around them were bathed in the effulgence of an Italian sunset; the moon was rising over the Esquiline, and the city was fast changing the glowing tints of sunset, for the mild silver moonlight.

They walked together, and stood on the bridge, known as the Pons Fabricius, gazing at the Tiber as it flowed beneath them, reflecting the brightness of the skies.

"Is the bishop to be found here? Why do you take this route?" said Æmilius.

"His holiness is inhabiting a small house in the Regio Transtibertina to night, for his own house is suspected and they are probably watching for him there."

"They would hardly look for him there amongst the Jews and fishermen," replied Æmilius, "I do hope God will preserve him to us; Stephen is with the Saints, may God preserve us Xystus."

"He will raise up another when it shall please him to remove our present dear father; we must leave all in His gracious Hands."

Æmilius was silent; he was most fondly attached to Xystus, whose private secretary he had been since his elevation to the Episcopate, and he loved him as a child loves a kind parent.

God had watched over the son of Cornelius; he had found friends immediately he reached Rome, seven years before, to whom the letters of Fabius, then the Bishop of Antioch, but since numbered with the martyrs, commended him; the liberal education he had received, had enabled him to make a suitable return for this lavish hospitality; he had been successfully ordained as ostiarius, exorcist, reader, acolyte, and was hoping, in due time, to attain the grade of the priesthood, and finally the crown of martyrdom, for he had never forgotten the last words of Eteocles.

He never attended a Celebration of the Holy Mysteries, without mentally adding the name of that dear friend, to whom he owed his second birth, to the names of the saints in the canon; he felt as S. Augustine said afterwards, when speaking of the martyrs, that it was unsuitable to pray for one by whose prayers he felt he was commended to God.

The two friends stood gazing upon the Tiber until the daylight had fled away, when they entered the island, which was entirely devoted to sacred buildings, no less than five temples existing on its small area; crossing the other bridge, the Pons Cestius, they were at once in the most populous district of the city, the Suburra excepted.

They made their way with difficulty through the motley crowd; hawkers were crying their wares, boys offering smoking sausages for supper, or to the very poor, boiled peas; ten thousand might have supped in this manner, for less expense than that of an ordinary supper in the homes of the wealthy, for the dish cost but one "as" or three farthings.

But amidst all this noise and bustle, one cry, a

distant shout, was ever and anon prominent, and that cry was ever "Christianos ad leones."

They were too much accustomed to danger to shudder at this. No Christian rose in the morning without feeling that torture and death might be his portion ere night, in those perilous times.

And now Laurence stopped at the door of a low mean house, but one of considerable size; he knocked, and waited patiently until a man appeared at the door; he knew them, and admitted them into a large hall.

"Is his holiness within?"

"He waits to see you," was the reply.

And they were led into the presence of Xystus, the successor of the martyred Stephen.

CHAPTER II.

XYSTUS AND LAURENCE.

IN a study, simply furnished, from which every mark of luxury and wealth was banished, sat Xystus, the Bishop of Rome, and Patriarch of the West.

He was aged, his venerable silver locks and benevolent countenance well befitted the aged warrior of the Cross, who had now reached the evening of a life spent in trials and conflicts for the Faith of Christ.

He was writing on parchment, so intently that he hardly noticed the opening of the door and the entrance of Laurence and Æmilius.

"Father," said Laurence, "we are here in obedience to your commands."

"It is well, my children, I have to give you my last instructions, for my time is at hand; for me the night is far spent, and the everlasting day about to dawn."

"Father," replied Laurence, "we pray that God may long spare you to us poor children: we need your care."

"He has shewn me that I must shortly put off this earthly tabernacle," replied Xystus, "and I have but sent for you now, to give my last instructions;

to-morrow I celebrate the Holy Mysteries at the church in the cemetery of Calixtus, and you Laurence will act as my deacon; *you* will be present also, as acolyte, Æmilius, my son; it may be our last meeting before the altar throne on earth."

"Father, if we part, it will be but a brief parting," said Laurence.

"I believe it will be brief indeed, my son; and now tell me, you were present at the Capitol; what took place?"

"The haruspex said, of course, that the omens were bad, and his accomplices raised the cry, '*Christianos ad leones*,' which was borne immediately to all parts of the city on the lips of thousands."

"We heard it here," said the bishop, "but those words are to us the trumpet notes which sound to victory; nevertheless this fierce outbreak will test the faith of the brethren, and some, alas, will fall; while others will conquer by sufferings. But, Laurence, I would speak now to you upon a subject of great importance."

"Father, I listen."

"The treasures of the church are in your care, and should anything befall you when I am gone, they are in danger of falling into the hands of the heathen; therefore, I leave you my full authority to dispose of those treasures, even of the consecrated vessels of the altar, as you think best; remembering that the living vessels, filled by the Holy Spirit, are the poor of Christ, who are far more precious in His Sight than gold or silver."

"My father, I accept the trust."

"And for you, my dear son, Æmilius," said the bishop, "I have a charge, but a dangerous one."

"Father, I accept it."

"There is danger everywhere, in Rome as in every country where our Holy Faith has penetrated; and in sending you forth, I do but slightly increase that peril, but I must tell you what the task is. The Bishops of Mesopotamia, and Armenia, have requested direction and advice, on important points of discipline, from the Four Patriarchs of the Church, and I have but now completed my letters, which will not reach them until my warfare is accomplished, and the rest won; I now need a messenger."

"Father, commit the letters to me; I will bear them, and guard them with my life."

"It is a long journey and a perilous one, for not only is all the Roman world a scene of danger for the Christian, but the Kings of Persia persecute the Faith; and are now threatening to overrun Mesopotamia, as they have already overrun Armenia; so that our brethren are in great distress. You must present the letters I give you, to the Bishops at Edessa, Carrhæ, and finally at Nisibis, which will be the end of your journey; in every city you will receive hospitality on presenting this letter, bearing testimony to your soundness in the Faith, and zeal for the Lord. Laurence will supply you with gold that you may defray the expenses of your journey, while a trusty friend has already procured the necessary documents which will secure freedom to travel wherever the Roman rule extends."

"When shall I set out, Father?" said Æmilius, as he received the precious documents.

"Within a week at the latest, and meanwhile bid farewell to your friends here; God only knows when you will see their faces again; whether it will be here, or in Paradise. When you have accomplished your mission, you may tarry where the Lord

shall make you a home, or return hither, where my successor will be to you a father."

"And now, my sons, we must separate for the night, you may perhaps rest safely at my house in the Vicus Patricius, for your persons are probably unknown to those who watch for me; or at the villa, where the entrance to the cemetery lies."

They knelt for his blessing, received it, and committed themselves to the streets, which were at this period brilliantly lighted.

Passing over the Tiber by the bridges and island before described, they made their way towards the Vicus Patricius. It was now late and the *tabernæ* or shops were closed for the night, excepting those for the sale of wine, which shone like our modern gin palaces.

The city was in great confusion; now and then they heard the shouts of some noisy party returning from a debauch and shouting the cry of the day, "Christianos ad leones." Once drawing back into a narrow and dark passage, a crowd of heathen passed rapidly by them, pursuing some victim who had aroused their suspicions; once they retreated into a side street as they heard the sounds of horns, fifes, and cymbals approaching, and narrowly escaped a procession which would have been the source of great danger.

Firstly came a multitude carrying branches and brandishing torches, which they dashed together in time with the noisy music, then some flamens, of sensual appearance, carrying a hideous image of some Egyptian deity, whose worship was becoming fashionable, and which they forced every chance passenger they met to kiss, trampling beneath their feet those who refused to do so.

Happily Laurence and Æmilius in their dark recess escaped notice; but only escaped the first band of idolators to fall in with another drunken set who were doing honour to Bacchus, and from these they had to fly for their lives: for refusal to join in their orgies, or salute their god, would be a sufficient declaration of Christianity to end matters at once, and our friends had a work to do.

At last they reached the Vicus Patricius in safety; the street appeared unwatched, and they entered the residence of the bishop without observation. It stood on the present site of the church, S. Pudentiana, which is probably the oldest church in the world, for the house had originally belonged to the Pudens and Claudia, mentioned by S. Paul, and a large inner hall had been used as a church from the beginning; the Saint to whom it was subsequently dedicated, being their grandchild.

Here was the wooden altar which tradition asserted to have been used by the Apostle S. Peter, which is now the high altar of the Lateran basilica; it was the only altar at which celebrations were permitted in Rome, when Christianity was young, the numbers of the faithful small, and the Eucharistic Sacrifice only offered in one place in each city, and that once only in the day by the bishop in person, assisted by all his clergy.

It may be interesting to English readers to learn that the Claudia here mentioned was probably the daughter of Caractacus, the heroic British chieftain who contended against Rome.

The stars were still shining and the dawn was slowly breaking in the east, when Laurence and

Æmilius passed out of the city, under the Porta Capena, then dripping with wet, and distilling a shower upon the heads of the wayfarers who passed beneath, from the aqueduct which was carried over it.

They were now on the famous Via Appia, along which they proceeded for nearly two miles, when they turned to the right hand, and entered a villa, towards which several other groups were pressing.

Here were lanterns and torches, which they bore as they descended by a flight of steps beneath the villa into a long straight gallery, crossed at right angles by other similar galleries, excavated in the sand, whereon the city was built, and forming a net-work where a person might easily become lost and die of hunger and exhaustion.

The walls of the passages were penetrated by long narrow openings, like the cells of a honey-comb, intended for graves; many were occupied, and the opening closed by stones, engraved with the simple inscription, "*Depositum in pace*," or with prayers for the refreshment of the departed, and supplications for their intercession, or occasionally with both combined, as in the inscription, "*Vivas in pace et pete pro nobis.*"

There were no fulsome eulogies of the departed; even the tombs of the martyrs, with the palm branch carved thereon, spoke but the language of Christian joy, and of victory through Christ.

It was impossible for youths like Laurence and Æmilius to tread these mansions of the dead without deep emotion, as they went their way to join in the offering of that Mystic Sacrifice, which is the key-stone of the arch which unites the Church in Paradise, with the Church Militant on Earth.

Here was a grave Laurence well knew, and his heart beat as he passed it. A boy of thirteen lay therein, whose remains were black and charred, for he had suffered by being exposed over a slow fire on a gridiron, for the love of his Lord.

Here again they marked the entrance to a subterranean church which had been discovered by the heathen, who had walled up the congregation during the celebration of the Holy Mysteries, where their remains, with the holy vessels in their midst, have been recently discovered.

But at last a strong light flashed down the passage they had entered: it led into the subterranean church of S. Calixtus, where the Holy Mysteries were about to be celebrated.

It consisted of two chambers to the right and left of the corridor respectively, that on the right being appropriated to the men, and that on the left to the women; they were only divided by pillars which did not intercept the sight.

Beyond the portion allotted to the men were the seats of the clergy in a kind of chancel, at the extreme end of which was the seat of the bishop, and around him in a semicircle those of his priests and deacons; the altar formed the chord of the apex, the celebrant standing behind it with his face to the people.

It is needless for us to describe the service; it was similar to the eastern use, which we have already described, in all essential points, but varied much in detail; the altar being exposed to sight, as with us.

The benediction had already been given, the ablutions were being received, the people were yet on their knees, when a sudden alarm was given

that the soldiers were at hand, and the congregation were bidden to disperse by the corridor leading in the opposite direction to that from which the sounds proceeded, which had startled the assembly.

The bishop and his clergy remained calmly awaiting the approach of the foe: while they reverently consumed the Blessed Sacrament, even those portions which had been reserved for the sick and the captives; lest they should fall into the hands of the heathen.

Then they prepared to depart, but it was too late, the soldiers had cut off the means of escape, and their leader, who had received special instructions from Macrianus, advanced, and apprehended the bishop, as he stood calmly awaiting their approach, on the very steps of the altar. They asked no questions, and apprehended no other person, according to the directions given by Macrianus, to whom this was a sad case of self-denial; still he dared not disobey the positive command he had received the day before from his master, Valerian, an order which might perhaps have been countermanded had he but seen the emperor *after*, instead of *before* the sacrifice described in our last chapter.

They led their prisoner a short distance along the corridor, when Laurence followed them, and cried aloud,—

"Father, where are you going without your son? Priest, where are you going without your deacon? You were never wont to offer sacrifice without me, your minister: suffer me now to share this sacrifice, to whom you have so often entrusted the Blood of the Lord."

Æmilius heard these words, for, disdaining to

fly, he was immediately behind Laurence, and he heard the reply also.

"Be of good cheer, my son, within three days thou shalt accomplish a more glorious victory than mine."

Suddenly the soldiers paused, consulted, then they bid the bishop kneel down, and stretch out his neck; he did so, commending his soul to God: the sword flashed in the light of the torches, and his sorrowing companions heard the head fall heavily on the ground.

The soldiers left the catacomb, and his children took up the holy remains; they bore them with all fitting honour back to the church, wherein he had but just offered the Eucharistic Sacrifice: and there they placed them before the altar, that his flock might assemble, and bear him to his last resting place, as a bishop and a saint should be borne.

Laurence and Æmilius left the church. They learned from some Christians whom they met, that a deacon, Quartus, had been slain by the soldiers, whom he had met accidentally, and who seemed incapable of further forbearance. Continuing their way to another entrance of the catacomb, which had not yet been discovered by the foe, they returned in silence to the Vicus Patricius; Æmilius meditating on the meaning of the last words of Xystus, and fearing that he was destined to lose Laurence, whom he so deeply loved.

The Church of Rome at that early period, possessed considerable riches, which were under the charge of Laurence, as archdeacon.

Besides its clergy, it maintained at this period many widows and virgins, in addition to fifteen hundred poor people, whose names the archdeacon

preserved in his list; and it often sent large alms for the support of Divine worship in the distant parts of the earth.

In addition to this it possessed rich vessels of gold and silver, embossed, and set with jewels, for the service of the altar.

Of these riches Macrianus had heard, and he longed to grasp them; therefore, upon the very morning in which Xystus had glorified God by his death, he sent to seize Laurence, who had returned, as we have seen, to the house in the Vicus Patricius, with Æmilius, and full of hope was patiently awaiting such an event. The last words of the Bishop had sunk deeply in his heart; he knew they would be fulfilled, and that the crown, which he so eagerly coveted, would shortly be his.

While thus meditating, the officers came to seek him, he made no attempt to escape, but turned to Æmilius, embraced him, rebuked him for his tears, and accompanied the guards.

Æmilius followed the officers as they entered the forum and took their prisoner to the Æmilian basilica, situated on the Via Sacra, near the Temple of Janus.

The basilica was crowded at this hour of the day, there were always unhappy prisoners to be tortured, and the lovers of cruelty, who were numerous in Rome, might here gratify their depraved tastes; still Æmilius pressed in amongst the crowd, and drew near the spot where his friend stood before the savage Macrianus, his hands meekly folded, his countenance suffused with unearthly joy.

"Are you Laurence, a deacon, as the Christians call you?"

"I am, by God's great mercy."

"Do you refuse to sacrifice?"

"I do."

"Then you know the consequences?"

"I am prepared, by God's help, to meet them."

"You Christians are wont to complain," said Macrianus, "that we treat you with cruelty and mangle your bodies; such cruelties, however, are now far from my thoughts. I am told that you possess treasures of gold and silver, that your priests use golden vessels in their Mysteries, that at your nocturnal sacrifices you have waxen tapers in golden candlesticks."

"The Church, indeed, possesses great treasure," replied Laurence.

"Then bring these treasures forth. I am told that your sacred books tell you to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and the emperor has need of these riches for the defence of the empire. I am told that Christ, your God, was poor in gold and silver, and rich in words. Be, therefore, consistent,—give us the gold and silver, and keep the words for your own use."

"The Church hath such riches that the emperor is poor in comparison; give me time, that I may make an inventory, and I will deliver to you this treasure."

"I give you three days," said Macrianus; "at the end of that period, I will come in person to the house where you were arrested in the Vicus Patricius and receive this treasure, and you shall be free to do what you will and go where you will. Guards, release the prisoner."

Laurence came forth, the crowd marvelling that he had, as they supposed, yielded; many, who as usual had betted freely on his endurance, being greatly disappointed.

Æmilius joined him; he did not comprehend the meaning of his friend's words, but he knew there was more in them than was apparent upon the surface.

"Three days, Æmilius," said Laurence; "three days,—the very period the bishop foretold; we must collect the treasures."

Æmilius looked up inquiringly.

"The true treasures of the Church are the living temples of God,—the poor whom we have always with us; we must collect them, and I shall divide all the earthly treasure committed to my keeping amongst them, according to the last wishes of our martyred bishop; you will help me?"

"With all my heart."

"Then *you* go through the Suburra, and bid them all assemble at daybreak in the Vicus Patricius. *I* shall send to all the regions across the Tiber, and meanwhile I shall employ myself in converting the riches of the Church into money, that they may be the more easily divided amongst those who have need; even the sacred vessels which exceed our needs must be melted down."

"And then when Macrianus comes?"

"I shall have treasure to show him, such as he does not expect to behold," replied Laurence.

The evening of the third day had arrived, and on the morrow the arrival of Macrianus was to be expected, that he might receive the "treasures" of the Church.

It was the 9th of August, and Æmilius and Laurence were seated in the library of the house already mentioned, and their conversation was of the hea-

venly city, whose gates Laurence was firmly persuaded he should enter on the morrow.

Æmilius had never seen him so happy; his work was done on earth, and his conversation was of such thrilling interest, that in after years, sentence after sentence returned upon the mind of his companion cheering many a dark hour.

"It is not God's will to call you yet, dear Æmilius," he said; "you must not weep for me, only rejoice that I have gained the crown; *you* may live to see the Church triumphant over all her foes, perhaps to see those days, which I believe await her, when Rome shall be Christian, and kings the fathers, and queens the nursing mothers of God's heritage; I shall behold it from Paradise."

"Do not weep," he continued, as he saw that the tears were falling fast down the cheeks of his friend, "the distance between us will not be great; we shall still pray, and in prayer will be our true union, you, for my perfect consummation in bliss, I, that God will bring you to that blessed shore which I shall have gained through the Red Sea of Blood."

The three days had passed, and the fourth morning, that of August 10th, had risen upon the earth, when Macrianus made his appearance, attended by a select retinue, and was received by Laurence at the entrance to the atrium.

"Are the treasures collected?"

"They are, my lord," replied Laurence; "enter and view them."

Well might Macrianus be astounded to behold the sight before him; *there* stood the poor of the

Church, a chosen number; a row of the lame, a row of the blind, of orphans, of widows, of the decrepid and maimed.

Astonished by the sight, he turned savagely round upon Laurence:

"What do you mean by this insolence?"

"These," said Laurence, "are the treasures of the Church, and *there*, in the widows and consecrated virgins, you behold her pearls and precious stones; these are the true riches, make use of them for yourself, your emperor, and your country; their prayers will be your weapons against your foes."

"Do you thus mock me?" replied the prefect. "Is it thus that you insult the axes and the fasces, the symbols of Roman power? It shall cost you your life."

"Death has no terrors for the Christian," replied Laurence.

"No; I know that in your maniacal frenzy you despise death, but you shall feel yourself dying; I will protract your tortures that you may die by inches, and *that* will be less than you deserve, vile worshipper of an ass's head, cannibal, murderer of children that you are!"

The lictors seized upon Laurence and led him to the basilica.

Æmilius, who had witnessed the scene described, fearing to behold the agony of his friend, hardly dared to follow, but conquered the feeling and went, that he might assist by his prayers and learn how to suffer; for the faithful were instructed not to shun these scenes of triumph.

He beheld a fire of small coals made on the floor of the basilica, and a huge gridiron placed over it; he beheld the martyr stripped, extended,

laden with chains, and cast upon this fearful bed; he beheld the flesh blister and break over the fire, and saw the steam arise from the body; he beheld the flesh creep and tremble, and each muscle seem to possess spasmodic life as it quivered with agony; but he gazed upon the countenance; not a nerve seemed disturbed there, not a shade of agony passed over those glorious features; the upraised eyes seemed, like the dying eyes of S. Stephen, the first deacon, to behold the glory that shall be revealed; and to the excited imagination of Æmilius and his fellow Christians who were present, an aromatic smoke, like sweet incense, arose from his body, and a halo of glory surrounded his head. Not a sigh escaped him, not a murmur, but with his dying breath he prayed for Rome, and besought the conversion of the empire to God; and so, lifting up his eyes to heaven, he gave up the ghost.

It was the morning of the 11th of August, the sun shone brightly upon the crowded seaport of Ostia; the ships laden with merchandize, the waggons bearing goods to and from the quays, the pleasure boats seeking the sea, or gliding up the Tiber, while the noise, the constant collisions, the objurgations in all languages, were deafening.

A vessel was leaving the harbour bound for Antioch; the last pile of merchandize was taken in, the last passenger embarked. Slowly she swung down the river, and, gaining the sea, opened her sails to the breeze. Upon the higher deck stood a passenger gazing at the fast receding shore where he had found shelter for seven long years. It was Æmilius.

CHAPTER III.

ANTIOCH ONCE MORE.

WE must once more introduce our readers to the legatine palace of Antioch, situated upon the island, surrounded by the Orontes.

It is an old acquaintance who occupies the place of the legatus, and sits as host in the brilliant dining hall; yet it would be hard to recognise him at a glance. He appears thirty years of age, yet he has not completed his twenty-fifth year; upon his features, shapely enough to serve as a model for Apollo, in the beauty of their Grecian outline, an air of reckless pride sits dominant, while an expression, which even when he was a boy provoked distrust, still speaks in those features.

Can it be Eucrates? How then does he occupy a post of such distinction? Can he be the legatus wielding the mighty power of Rome in the metropolis of Syria?

It is indeed, yet truth compels us to add that his merits have had small share in placing him where he is; he owes his post not to his love, but to his hatred, for Rome.

It is through the contrivance of Macrianus, at this time all powerful with Valerian, that he holds this position, and those who sit with him are men

whom Rome would do well to crush; on the right is Cyriades, before introduced to notice, on his left a dark-featured Syrian, another friend of Macrianus, while an envoy from Persia, bearing ostensibly terms of peace for the acceptance of Rome, but in reality directions for the traitor, to be forwarded by Eucrates, occupies the next couch.

Macrianus was in outward appearance devoted to Rome, while he cherished a deadly hatred in his heart, the more intense because smothered; and he was such a prime minister to Valerian as Harpagus to Astyages,—a serpent nourished in the bosom.

His motives will be partly unfolded in the course of our tale, meanwhile it will suffice to mention that it was at present his object to further the schemes of Sapor, at the expense of Rome, and that he was straining every effort to betray her cause in the east, recommending traitors to Valerian for positions of trust, and otherwise undermining the Roman power.

But above all things it was necessary for him to secure Antioch, and he had long marked Eucrates, whose acquaintance he had made during a residence there, as a most unscrupulous partisan, capable of appearing devoted to Rome, while detesting everything Roman, and prepared to sacrifice every principle of honour and justice, if he could but humiliate her pride, or undermine her empire.

The duplicity, the power to deceive, which had been such an element in the youthful character of Eucrates, was a valuable quality in the eyes of

Macrianus; he brought him to Rome; introduced him to Valerian; caused him to enter the military service; procured him promotion from step to step, until he had attained such rank as would render him a most useful instrument; and then in the very year of which we are writing, when death had removed Numerian, procured the appointment of Eucrates as legatus, while hoary-headed generals, like Cornelius, were passed over.

It was an infatuation which possessed Valerian, nothing else can explain his conduct, and all his natural virtues were lost under the baneful influence of the Magian Macrianus.

"More wine, slaves," said Eucrates, "fill the glasses and leave us."

They had been drinking all the evening, supper had been succeeded by a symposium which had already lasted some hours, and yet Eucrates had not lost his cunning under its influence.

"To the health of Sapor," he cried "we must help ourselves, and drink a glass to each letter of his name."

"And confusion to Rome," said Cyriades, "it is a strange thing for Greeks to submit to *Persians*, yet these provinces were Persian before they were Greek, and I care not how soon Persia possesses them again."

"Health to Eucrates, our future Satrap," said the Syrian guest.

"It will not be long before our host may really possess that dignity, which will be only another name for King of Syria," added the Persian; "it is the wish of our prince, the mighty Sapor, and of his general, the warlike Artabanus, thus to show their gratitude."

"I have not yet done much to earn it," said Eucrates, "hitherto Macrianus has done all; my task has only begun, and the first consideration is how to humble the pride of these Roman legions, who will hardly obey me, knowing me to be a Greek, although I possess the boasted rights of Roman citizenship.

The name of Roman shall be a token of scorn in the east by and by," said Cyriades, "I hope to to see the last of their race perish in the amphitheatre here, as many better men have done; but what progress are we making? all this is idle talk."

"Macrianus is in great hope that he shall be able to persuade Valerian to invade Persia in person," said Eucrates.

"And if he does?"

The eyes of the Persian sparkled.

"Once beyond the Euphrates, only once, he shall never return."

"And we shall find him guides across the desert," said Eucrates.

"And furnish him with correct intelligence I suppose."

"We shall furnish correct intelligence of every movement to—*Sapor*."

"But all this is building castles in the air, Valerian will never come."

"Oh, yes, he will," said Eucrates, "Macrianus writes me word that it only needs a little more provocation."

"And he shall have it," replied the Persian; "Artabanus is moving upon Nisibis; and he will put all the Romans he finds there to the sword, as he has done in Armenia."

"This Artabanus must be a grand fellow," said Eucrates.

"There never was a finer general, and he has one great qualification, hatred to Rome; intense, unsparing hatred."

"There is but one good thing of Roman origin, that is the amphitheatre with its beasts and gladiators," said Eucrates, "and I hope the Romans will enjoy it when they are the victims, not the spectators."

"That reminds me," said Cyriades, "that you have not given us much sport since you came into office."

"Wait, I am saving up all the Christians I can get, for a grand spectacle."

Just then the conversation was interrupted, the confidential freedman of Eucrates appeared, and announced that Milo, an individual employed by him as a spy to ferret out Christians, and for other questionable enterprises, particularly requested an interview.

"Shew him in, then," said Eucrates, "he is a most useful fellow, and must not be denied."

Milo shortly appeared, and the freedman retired.

"Well, Milo, you have not disturbed me without purpose, I suppose?"

"A ship has just arrived at the quay from Rome."

"Any tidings of importance?"

Milo handed a packet to his master.

"Is this all?"

"No," said Milo, "there is a passenger I want to talk about."

"Well, let us have it, who is he?"

"The very image of the cousin your excellency lost, seven years ago."

Eucrates started. "That cursed Æmilius; why, the vessel in which he sailed was shipwrecked."

"It may have been, but if the young man who landed here was not Æmilius, the son of Cornelius, it was his shade."

"Had the officers examined the passports of the passengers."

"Yes; his papers were all right, he travels under the name of Lucullus."

"Watch him well, then; see what he does, and where he goes; I believe it is all a dream of your wandering brain; it would not do to provoke the jealousy of the Romans here, by arresting one who might be a Roman citizen, unless one had cause to show; but if it were indeed my cousin, 'twould be the best gift the gods could send me; would he not make a splendid meal for a tiger? I don't suppose he would deny his Faith, and then I should like to spite that wretched uncle of mine."

Milo left the triclinium.

In truth Eucrates had contracted a most bitter hatred to his uncle; his share in the events leading to the martyrdom of Eteocles, came gradually to light, and Cornelius had entirely withdrawn his favour from his nephew, while Cornelia distinctly and emphatically repelled all his attentions.

Melissa, his mother, was now dead, and her death seemed to have severed the last tie, which connected him with the Cornelian family.

But he meant to have his full revenge; the coming revolution which he fondly hoped would overthrow the Roman power in Syria, would also place his uncle and his family in his power, and then he would see.

It was indeed Æmilius, who had been observed

by Milo while landing on the quay, for small vessels could then ascend the Orontes to Antioch.

With what emotion the wanderer gazed upon the familiar scene may easily be imagined; his heart beat wildly, as he gazed upon the huge walls of the amphitheatre, white and dazzling in the moon beams, and thought of Eteocles.

He knew he was in danger in Antioch, and might not delay, yet he could not resist the temptation, ere seeking shelter for the night in the Episcopal residence, to stroll towards the too-well-known building.

The great street of the colonnades was blazing with light from lamps suspended between the columns and from the open windows of the splendid shops. The wealth of every nation had contributed to this luxurious emporium. In one shop were exposed works of art in marble or Parian stone, and pictures of indescribable beauty; in another, robes of the tissues of the east, rich in colour and embroidery; in another, beautiful slaves were standing like statues, exposed for sale at fancy prices; another was a book shop with the choicest works of Rome, Greece, and the East, works such as, in some instances, a Christian might not even open without pain; in another, swords of Damascus and weapons of every conceivable character glittered in the light; here was a tavern or wine-shop, and the boisterous song found its way into the night air, or the obscene joke re-echoed.

The streets were crowded by men of all nations, but while the Syrian predominated, all the wealth and power seemed Roman or Greek. Did a grand chariot, drawn by milk white steeds, clatter down the street, it was Roman; and even the foot pas-

sengers who boasted that mighty name wore an air of superiority which seemed to assert their dominion over the baser clay around.

Æmilius reached the forum. There stood the basilica, its columns of Corinthian architecture fronting him; it was closed, but Æmilius well knew how day by day the shriek of agony reverberated within those walls, unless, indeed, the sufferer could claim that Divine aid which alone could still the agitated nerves and give peace amid torments, as once to Eteocles.

Beyond rose temple after temple, but their votaries had now sought the wine-shop, or the other delights which the senses could so easily command in this haunt of luxury and vice.

And now he reached the amphitheatre. The great entrance to the arena stood open; there was nothing in its solitude to tempt cupidity; he entered, and stood where Fidenatus had gazed upon the leopard, where the stake had been planted to which Eteocles had been attached. Feelings of sweet joy and confidence in God filled his mind, not feelings of sorrow; he thought of the mighty grace which had conquered such agony and had despised death, and he knew that such grace would be his in his hour of need, whenever it might be.

A voice interrupted the current of his thoughts: "A fine amphitheatre this, sir; one that has witnessed many a gallant tussle between man and man, or man and beast."

It was a Greek who addressed him; this was evident at a glance,—a tall, thin individual, whose manner was insinuating yet not prepossessing.

"It is indeed a fine building," replied Æmilius.

"Perhaps you are a stranger to our noble city;

may I be your guide to its beauties and pleasures?"

"Nay, I am but a passenger through Antioch, and cannot delay."

"Still, I may assist you; you may be ignorant of the means of locomotion, and I, as a native of Antioch, know them all: boats to Seleucia, or up the river; posts to the Cilician gates; caravans to Mesopotamia, Armenia, Persia, or India."

"I need not trouble you, my arrangements are already made."

"Nothing I can do for you?"

"Only to leave me in peace."

"I crave pardon; I do not wish to intrude upon your privacy, not even to tell you of a decent inn where you may rest."

"My lodging is found."

"Perhaps with some noble Roman family, such, for instance, as that of the rich Cornelius? I see you are Roman."

"In that case," said Æmilius, "you may be aware that Romans do not communicate their private affairs to strangers."

He moved some paces from his interrogator, whose persistence was annoying, although not greater than strangers had often to endure from those Greeks who made their living much as the "commissionaires" one meets in modern continental cities; but then Æmilius knew that his position was one of danger.

He left the amphitheatre, and made his way to the quay, received his baggage, which was very little, from the *publicans* who collected the duties upon merchandize, and, carrying it himself, made his way towards the suburb, where lay the house of

the bishop in which he had slept the night before the martyrdom of Eteocles.

As he passed through the streets, he perceived that the individual he had met in the amphitheatre was dogging his steps; he knew that it would not be safe to make his way in such a case directly to the home he sought; he knew the streets of Antioch well, and, exerting his ingenuity, succeeded in totally baffling his pursuer in the comparative darkness of the back streets, and in reaching the home of the bishop in safety.

He knocked at the door, after satisfying himself that no one watched him, and was immediately admitted upon producing the letters he carried, and was introduced at once to the bishop, who thus lived in concealment, his residence being known only to the Christians.

He was received by Demetrianus, the successor of the martyred Fabius, with great pleasure, and the tidings he brought from Rome produced emotions of joy mingled with sorrow. The good patriarch, for such was the rank of the Bishop of Antioch, could not restrain himself when he heard of the glorious deaths of Xystus and Laurence; he walked up and down his limited apartment, shedding tears of sympathy and joy, praising God for the grace thus displayed, and entreating the same grace that he might follow when God should call.

Æmilius was now anxious to learn news concerning the home of his boyhood, and at last, when Demetrianus had exhausted his enquiries concerning the state of the Church in Rome, he asked,—

"Have you any tidings which will gladden me, my father, concerning my old home?"

"I fear not; you were the solitary fruit to God of the prayers of Eteocles, whom I well knew; yet we must not despair; pray for your friends, according to the flesh, without ceasing."

"I do ever pray for them," said Æmilius.

"Your father takes little interest in Antioch; he finds all his recreation and occupation upon his own estate; they say he strives to make all around him happy, and that he is a perfect type of the Roman of better and brighter days."

"I know it; he possesses much natural goodness, and I can but hope that God has better days yet in store for him. My dear mother, can you tell me anything about her? my sister, too?"

"I have heard that your mother yet sorrows for her son, but time must have partly healed the wound; your sister is yet single, in spite of the pressing attentions of Eucrates, our new governor, which are matter of notoriety."

"What kind of governor does Eucrates prove?"

"He has been in authority so short a time that it is difficult to answer the question, but he professes the most slavish subserviency to the authority of Rome, and the utmost zeal to carry out the orders of Cæsar for the destruction of Christianity."

"He would need little pressing, I fear, to do that," said Æmilius.

"And yet no martyrdoms have as yet taken place under his authority, but we shall not have long to wait; several of the brethren are captives, reserved for the approaching games."

"And now, my son," said the bishop, "you must retire to rest; you shall sleep in the same chamber which you occupied when you last slept here, the night before your dear friend Eteocles

gained his crown; to-morrow you had better leave us very early disguised in Syrian costume; I will send one of the brethren to assist you in your arrangements."

"I shall have little difficulty," said Æmilius; "I must purchase a horse, for which means have been supplied me, ride to the route leading to the desert, and attach myself to the first caravan which leaves the inn on its borders for the Euphrates."

"There is a caravan about to leave Antioch to-morrow; I had intended to entrust letters for Carrhæ to its care. I have already sent a special messenger to the more distant churches with letters upon the subject to which those in your care, as I suppose, refer; but you will now kindly convey these to Carrhæ?"

"Willingly," said Æmilius; "I have some little reason to fear that I am watched, and that my presence in Antioch is suspected; I had some difficulty in throwing a very inquisitive fellow off my track to-night, so I shall leave by daybreak, immediately after the celebration of the Holy Mysteries, and join the caravan at the last stage before the desert is reached."

They parted for the night. Æmilius knelt and received the blessing of the venerable patriarch, retired to his room, and thought of Eteocles till he fell asleep.

He could hardly recall the feelings he had then, for he felt that, if he had the power, he would not for worlds recall the martyr from his seat of bliss; he only wondered when the words would come true which had foretold his own conflict, and prayed for grace to meet it when it did come.

He rose early; before daybreak he had received

the Blessed Sacrament from the hands of the bishop, in company with the faithful, who met to worship at the Church attached to the Episcopal residence, we cannot say palace.

Receiving the parting blessing, he issued forth into the town while the dawn was yet breaking; he was supplied with a good horse suitable for his purpose by one of the brethren, and, as the sun appeared, rode forth from the eastern gate of Antioch. He crossed the river, and struck into the same route which he and Eucrates had followed in the excursion described in the second chapter of our tale; it brought him within sight of his home, which he gazed upon with tender emotion and fervent prayers for those dear friends it contained, but he could not delay.

Ere the evening, he was on the borders of the desert, and as he descended from the Syrian hills towards its level and gazed upon the waste of sand before him, he saw the inn where he was to find refuge for the night, situated amidst the vegetation which surrounded the last spring of water, ere the carpet of grass which clothed the hills was succeeded by the barren surface of the waste.

He found sufficient hospitality, and a little chamber wherein he might pass the night in solitude. About sunset the expected caravan arrived; he sought its captain, and gained permission to attach himself to the company, on the payment of certain fees; then he commended himself to God, and slept in peace.

In the course of the day, while Æmilius was drawing near the end of his journey, Milo received

a summons to repair to the presence of Eucrates, the legatus.

"Well," said that worthy when he appeared, "who was the fellow you told us of?"

"He has utterly disappeared, my lord; I have sought him in vain; he must know the city well to baffle me as he has done."

"I am convinced that he cannot be my cousin," said Eucrates, "and I have something of greater importance for you to attend to. I must send you again as a messenger to Artabanus; you will find him in the neighbourhood of Nisibis if you travel sharply."

"I am at your excellency's service, but it is a very long journey."

"And shall be paid accordingly. There is a caravan which has started this morning in which you may cross the desert; if you ride at once you will overtake them during the earlier part of the night."

And Milo departed to make his preparations for the journey.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DESERT.

THE caravan to which Æmilius had attached himself numbered nearly a hundred travellers, some of whom rode on camels, others upon horses, while the slaves had frequently to trudge on foot, leading the camels who bore the merchandize. Provisions and water had to be carried in large quantities, for, although the desert abounded with oases, yet days might pass without bringing such opportunities in the route of the wayfarers.

There was much variety of manner and costume amongst the travellers: there was the Syrian merchant with his slaves; the Jew, who possessed but a camel's burden, but who enjoyed, as his race yet enjoys, the reputation for money-getting and secret wealth; the Greek who, following the roving disposition of his countrymen of that age, sought a new home for himself and family amidst the fertile plains of Mesopotamia; the Roman, who travelled on public or private affairs, to the distant garrisons of his country, on the banks of the Euphrates, or to the inland cities of Nisibis, Edessa, or Carrhæ; while a motley retinue of slaves, or hired servants, who led the horses or camels, and ministered to the ease of their masters at the various

halts, added greatly to the number of these inland voyagers.

At the hour of noon the cavalcade halted; a haze hung over the desert, but the hills they had left in the vicinity of the Orontes were still visible across the waste, forming a blue outline which seemed to tell of a land of plenty beyond the deep red sand of the desert.

Tents were erected,—light structures which folded easily and were carried by the camels,—and beneath these, shelter from the noontide heat was obtained; a slight meal was taken; and the whole party slept, leaving two or three slaves on guard, in case the Arabs of the desert should have wandered so far northward, for the children of Ishmael bore the reputation which they have sustained even to this day,—their hand was against every man, and every man's hand was against them.

Æmilius slept lightly, and about the ninth hour rose, and gazed forth upon the wilderness. The sun was already sinking towards those western hills which lay between him and the home of his boyhood, upon which he had so recently gazed once more; he next wandered to the further side of the camp and looked to the east; the same monotonous sandy waste extended so far as the eye could reach; here and there were whitened heaps, the bones of elephants, or camels, who had perished from time to time in the passage of the desert; and, far in the distance, was a single dark spot,—the oasis where they hoped to pass the coming night.

While he gazed, he heard a step behind him, and beheld the Greek whom he had met in the amphitheatre at Antioch, whom we have introduced to our readers by the name of Milo.

There was something about the appearance and manner of this individual which jarred upon Æmilius, and their former interview had left a feeling of mistrust upon his mind; yet he had drunk too deeply of the spirit of Christianity to allow such feelings to influence him unduly.

"Our companions sleep soundly," observed Milo.

"It would, perhaps, be better for us if we were able to do so; we have a long day's journey before us," was the reply.

"I do not doubt that we shall tire of it before we reach the Euphrates. Do you travel far beyond the river?"

"Some distance," said Æmilius.

"And so do I; I have to reach the neighbourhood of Nisibis within twelve days. Do our roads lie together after reaching Mesopotamia?"

"For a time they may do so."

"I cannot help thinking that I have met you before," said the Greek; "your voice seems familiar to me. You are not a native of Syria, I suppose?"

"I have just arrived from Rome; you may remember I met you in Antioch."

"You do not know Antioch well, then?"

"I have just passed through it within the last few days, as you are aware."

"Because there is a noble Roman who lives there, who bears so striking a resemblance to you in appearance, manner, and even in voice, that he *might* be your father. I speak of the noble Cornelius, of whom every native of Antioch has heard."

Æmilius could not repress a slight change of feature, which Milo carefully noted.

"The strange thing about this Cornelius," he continued, "is that nearly ten years ago he lost

a son, who fled from home because he had become tainted with the poisonous infection of Christianity; they said the vessel was lost in which he was discovered to have sailed from Seleucia, but I know some travelling merchants who assert that they have seen him since at Rome."

"How did the lad manage to escape?"

"They say," said the other, "that Numerian, who was then legatus, winked at his escape, because he was the son of an aristocrat, but if the present legatus had been in power matters would have been very different; Eucrates never lets a Christian escape be he gentle or simple."

To the great relief of Æmilius, who felt that he was treading upon dangerous ground, the horn was blown which summoned the sleepers from their slumbers, and in a few minutes the tents were struck, and the whole party was in motion. They reached the oasis about sunset; it was a little area of vegetation, encompassing a spring, the source of all the fertility which extended around until, in a short space, the waters became absorbed in the sands. A few palm trees found root here, and smaller plants and bushes grew in abundance around the spring.

The horses and camels seemed delighted with the fresh water and the sweet grass; while the whole party felt their spirits raised as they kindled their fires, cooked their food, and conversed at ease while the merry song arose from various groups scattered throughout the length of the oasis.

The moon arose, and all crept beneath the shade of tent or tree to avoid the influence of her light during the hours of sleep, which was supposed to exert a very unfavourable influence upon the health.

During the night Æmilius arose; his position was too novel to allow him to sleep soundly; he walked to and fro, recalling in memory the scenes he had so recently witnessed in Rome, thinking of that Paradise into which Xystus and his deacon had now entered, praying with great earnestness that God would make him also worthy to share their rest. Sometimes he thought of the perilous journey he had entered upon, and of the unknown lands beyond the desert towards which he was hastening. As he looked out upon the wastes lying in the chill light of the moon, those words came to his mind forcibly,—"The sun shall not burn thee by day neither the moon by night; the Lord shall preserve thee from all evil, yea, it is even He that shall keep thy soul." And he felt happy in the assurance of that Divine protection, knowing that all things work together for good to those who love God.

Gazing again across the desert, he was surprised to see some dark objects on the verge of the eastern horizon which appeared to be moving nearer. He continued to gaze upon them, until he felt sure that they were horsemen coming down upon the camp with the speed of the wind. At once he turned to the sentinel posted near him; the man was leaning against the trunk of a tree asleep. Æmilius woke him; he gazed upon the figures, and raised a cry, which instantly alarmed the whole camp. All was confusion; a circle was made enclosing the animals and the baggage in the centre; by the time this was done the enemy was at hand.

It was not a very dangerous foe to so large a caravan,—some thirty horsemen bearing spears; they looked wild and ferocious beyond imagination, but as they gazed upon the numbers of the party,

the light of whose fire had attracted their attention, they seemed to think the prize beyond their grasp, and, raising a fierce shout of defiance, galloped away in the direction from which they had come.

The watchfulness of Æmilius had saved the camp, but he did not make it known; for had he done so the slave who had proved so inefficient a sentinel would probably have lost his life as a warning to the others.

They observed much greater care afterwards, for they knew not whether the foe might not return in increased numbers; but the day's journey was accomplished in safety, and they rested the second night amidst the luxuriant foliage which fringed the upper waters of the Chalus.

They had left this belt of vegetation far behind them, and once more the horizon was limited by the sand, which no longer formed a level plain, but was raised here and there in mounds, forming two ranges of low hills which bounded the view; they expected to camp out in the desert that night, and on the evening of the following day—the fourth—to reach the mighty Euphrates, the boundary of Mesopotamia.

Æmilius was riding alone; he had fallen behind the party for the sake of meditation, and to avoid the conversation of Milo, who was always intruding his company upon him and putting questions which were so pointed as to convince Æmilius that the man had deep suspicion of his identity.

While thus riding alone, the caravan being about half a mile ahead, so that by spurring his horse he could reach it in five minutes, he was suddenly startled by hearing a voice call aloud:

"Æmilius!"

He listened attentively with great wonder, for of course he was only known in the camp by his assumed name.

"Æmilius," cried the voice again.

What was there in the voice which carried his thoughts backwards so forcibly to the days of his home life?

It was the voice of his mother, the tone, the accent, all seemed hers.

He could hardly contain his surprise and emotion. He rode hastily away from the track, across the low hill of sand from behind which the sound appeared to come, and gazed vacantly upon the empty space before him, no soul was in sight. "Æmilius," said the voice again, from beyond the next range of sand hills. He rode forward, gained the second range, crossed it, there was no one there.

And now he felt that he had been deceived, perhaps by some evil spirit, and wondered that the illusion had overcome him; he had heard tales concerning the desert voices before.

He attempted to retrace his steps, and to rejoin the band, but this was more easily contemplated than performed, for when he had gained the summit of the range of sand hills which he supposed were those he had first scaled, the caravan had disappeared from sight.

Still there would be the footmarks in the sand, he might follow them, and he descended quickly, feeling some little anxiety, lest he should be unable to overtake his companions. He reached the spot, but saw nothing save the clear fine sand of the desert, no footprint was there, either he had mistaken his route, or the wind had completely

filled up all the indentations of footprint and hoof-mark alike.

He was now seriously alarmed, and, committing himself to the care of Providence, rode rapidly forward along the valley, between the sand hills, where he supposed the caravan had passed, trusting to overtake them. He had ridden thus for about an hour, when the mounds on each side of him ceased abruptly, and he entered a level plain.

Was it a dream? Before him at the distance of two miles, over the level waste, rose the walls and towers of a mighty city, the setting sun bathing its pinnacles in golden light.

Uttering a cry of joy he rode onward, and drew nearer its walls; anxiety was at an end, he was at least secure of shelter and food.

But as he approached he was struck by the stillness which seemed to pervade the scene; he saw no sign of human life; no hum of voices arose; no passengers appeared around its gates; all bore the impress of death.

Somewhat startled as this fact dawned upon him, he paused, then proceeded again, and received confirmation of his first impressions as he advanced.

The gateways seemed to possess no gates; the pinnacles and towers appeared partially ruined; broken columns and gaps in the walls disclosed themselves; the foliage of trees now appeared growing in the midst of buildings.

"At least," thought he, "I shall find water here."

An indefinable awe was upon him as he entered the gateway; there was the pavement on each side, but grass and weeds grew in the interstices;

arches, columns, all testified to former magnificence; the residences of the lowly citizens were in utter ruin, but still the proud temples raised their heads, as if their masonry bid defiance to time, great in their decay.

It was a ruined city he had entered; one long deserted by its inhabitants, one famous in days of hoar antiquity, but one whose population had been swept off by some Assyrian or Babylonian conqueror, and whose very name had vanished from memory. Those streets had once swarmed with busy life, had echoed to the tread or the shout of the giddy sons of pleasure, the toiling multitudes, the military guard, but all was over now, and it lay silent in the waste as the dust of its former inhabitants; avoided by the very Arab of the desert, as a place accursed of God and man.

The sun was setting, and the darkness of night fell upon Æmilius as he penetrated this city of the dead, now startling some owl or ravenous bird, now some wild beast, which fled at the unwonted sight of man.

In the very centre of the city rose the ruins of an enormous temple, once known as the temple of the sun, but now, the place of its worshippers was supplied by the serpent which basked on its terraces in the day, and the beast of the desert which howled there by night.

Yet it had some attractions still for a weary traveller; beneath the outer walls of the temple a rivulet flowed, spanned by many broken arches; and many trees and shrubs,—the palm, the cedar, the ilex, the sycamore,—grew on its banks.

A flight of steps led upwards to a grand portico, whereon rose massive columns of great height; a

large doorway gave admittance to the great hall of the temple; on either side of which were cells once devoted to the idolatrous priests of the sun-god.

In one of these Æmilius determined to repose for the night: he first supplied his horse with food and water by tethering him in a secure spot where luxuriant grass grew on the banks of the stream, and then, retiring to his cell as the darkness gathered, raised the first prayer to God which had ever been breathed forth within those massive walls.

Darkness fell upon the city of the dead and he slept; it was almost strange he could sleep in such a place, but he knew in Whom he trusted. But in the dead of the night, he awoke with the conviction or rather the *feeling* that some awful being was present in the cell.

He looked up as a ray of moonlight streamed through a broken window; *there* stood a figure, suffused in its rays.

Its countenance was stern yet sad, the features such as Grecian artists assigned to Apollo, a white robe depended in graceful folds from the neck and reached to the ground, a chaplet was round the brows.

It beckoned with the hand for Æmilius to follow, and turned towards the door which stood open.

The eyes seemed to burn as they gazed upon the prostrate youth, while the hand made the imperious gesture again.

Æmilius felt an irresistible impulse, such as mesmeric patients are said to feel; he followed; they crossed the moonlit hall, entered into a passage leading behind the shrine, the walls excluded the

light, but the figure seemed luminous, and was visible even in the darkness.

And now a strange horror seized him, the sweat stood on his brow; he felt the approach of some fearful danger which he could not resist, when a voice, that perhaps of his guardian angel, whispered in his ear, "Stay, not another step."

Æmilius stopped, the figure turned and beckoned, he felt again the influence compelling him to follow; when once more the voice seemed to whisper, "Commit thyself to God."

He made the sign of the cross, and his tongue seemed unloosed, as the heart accompanied the outward sign; he addressed the figure,—

"In the Name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, who art thou?"

There was a fearful cry, and the spirit disappeared.

Æmilius still felt the horror on his mind; he advanced a foot cautiously, it found no rest, he was on the brink of a chasm; he sank upon the floor, and stretched out his hand, the pavement appeared to end just before him, as if it had given way and fallen through into some unknown depths below.

He dared not move until daylight found its way into those gloomy precincts, and revealed an awful chasm, whose depths the eye could not penetrate, veiled as they were in darkness; but it was plain that had he advanced another step, he would have been dashed in pieces.

Thanking God, Who had preserved him, he offered his morning tribute of prayer in the shrine of the false god, in utter defiance of its power; and then sought his horse which to his great joy he found safe, and refreshed by rest and food.

He had still some fragments of bread remaining, he made a very frugal meal, filled his water bottle at the rivulet, and then mounting rode towards the eastern gate of the city.

The desert stretched far and wide before him, he knew that the Euphrates crossed his path at right angles in the east, and that if he could only persevere in that direction for an entire day he might reach it.

So he marked the position of a distant dark spot which indicated an oasis, and which lay in the very beams of the rising sun; riding towards it, in a few hours the ruined city had sunk beneath the horizon, and its dark deities were undisturbed by the presence of a Christian.

CHAPTER V.

CHOSROES.

IT was evening when Æmilius approached the oasis where he hoped to pass the coming night. The Euphrates was not yet in sight; all the day he had toiled along, only resting at mid-day in that oasis which he had spied from the gate of the ruined city; and then fixing his route by the one he was now approaching, he had persevered beneath the burning rays, hoping that the gladdening stream would soon meet his gaze.

But for these islands of the desert he must have been hopelessly lost, and even now he knew not how far he had varied from his course; over and over again he had strained his gaze, hoping that the caravan he had quitted might be visible across the waste; but he had gazed in vain.

He reached the oasis in due course, and found a bright clear spring; he set his horse at liberty, and was about to kindle a fire, when he was startled by the sight of a man in Persian costume stretched at full length upon the grass.

It was at first doubtful to Æmilius whether he gazed upon a sleeper or upon a lifeless corpse: he gently raised the head and perceived that the stranger yet breathed, the first glance at the

features revealed the truth, the sufferer had reached the oasis, and sunk from the exhaustion of hunger.

He had but little food left, but this he cheerfully bestowed upon the stranger, who was soon sufficiently restored to look up and strive to thank his deliverer in words of a dialect unknown to Æmilius; receiving no answer, he sank back as if too weak to make another attempt. At last he spoke again, this time in the Syrian dialect.

"Where am I? how came I here? who are you?"

"You are in an oasis of the desert, and in the hands of a friend. How you came here, I know not."

"Where is the escort?" he said and looked around, and then sank back and made no further effort until after receiving some more food.

Meanwhile Æmilius had kindled a fire, producing the flame by rubbing two dried sticks together until the friction ignited them, then he lifted the stranger into an easy position in front of it, gave him some bread, and a little water from the stream, all he had to bestow, and prepared to sleep.

"How can I repay you?" said the sufferer faintly.

"I need no payment for saving the life of a fellow creature."

"And yet, pardon me, are you not a Roman?"

These words were uttered in a tone which indicated small faith in Romans in general, and there was little in this to surprise Æmilius.

"You must try to sleep now," he said; "sleep will restore you."

Committing himself to God, Æmilius lay down,

and, in a few minutes, he and his new companion, Roman and Persian, slept in peace; the night wind moaning harmlessly over them, as they lay under the protection of God, in the solitudes of the desert.

The dawn had appeared, and the first glimpses of the sun were already visible, when Æmilius arose and looked around him. In the west the desert lay in cold repose, but in the east he was startled to behold the rays of the rising sun reflected from the winding surface of some mighty river.

The young Persian was now awake, and leaning on his elbow uttered but one word, "Euphrates."

Æmilius was greatly rejoiced, for that word implied the recovery of his route, and the conquest of the chief peril of the journey; the remainder of the road lay through a partially cultivated district, —the fertile pastures of Mesopotamia.

"I knew I was near the river when I reached this spot yesterday," said the Persian, "but I could get no further."

The speaker now paused, and turning towards the glorious orb in the east, paid his devotions to the luminary, while Æmilius, sadly pitying his companion's blindness, paid *his* to its Maker.

"Do you worship the sun with us?" said the young fire-worshipper, when his devotions were ended, for he had observed that Æmilius, like him, prayed towards the east.

"God forbid," said Æmilius, "I worship Him Who made sun, moon, and stars."

"Do you mean Jupiter, Apollo, or which of the Roman gods?"

"Alas, they are but demons," replied Æmilius, "I worship the *one* true God; there is no other."

"You are perhaps a Christian then," said the other, "we have such in Persia, but they are forced to hide themselves, unless they wish, as I think some of them do, to be impaled or flayed alive."

"What have they done to merit so hard a fate."

"They refuse to worship with us, and blaspheme that beneficent god, the source of fertility as of light, who is represented by Mithra, the sun, so we do not permit them to behold his beams any longer."

Here the speaker paused, then continued.

"But I may be causing you pain, and you are my preserver, and may believe what you like; I only spoke as a Persian."

"You need not think of me," said Æmilius, "we do not worship the created but the uncreated Sun, from Whom all creation derives the principle of existence. Would that His Light shone upon you!"

"No! not on me," said the other, "I trust I am proof against such enchantments; do not let us talk any more about it; we will agree to differ."

He spoke so earnestly that Æmilius saw it was useless to press the subject then.

They made their morning meal together, and then Æmilius yielded his horse to the young Persian, who had lost his own, while he himself walked by his side, in spite of the reluctance of the other.

"I am quite well and strong," said Æmilius, "you are still very weak."

"Well! perhaps I may find a way of repaying you," was the reply, "for all that you have done. I must have perished but for you; how came you alone in the desert?"

"I lost the caravan I travelled with in a very

singular manner; but may not I ask you the same question?"

"Yes; and if ever we meet again, perhaps I may answer it. I would rather not tell you now. Will you tell me your story?"

Æmilius briefly narrated the strange adventures he had undergone, to which the other listened with great interest.

"Yes," he said, "I have heard of these voices before; they often seduce travellers from their path; these deserts bear a most evil reputation, and few dare to venture upon them alone. You may think yourself most happy that you have escaped: and now tell me where are you going?"

"To the town of Nisibis."

"Nisibis; I hope not, let me give you one word of advice; do not venture there."

"May I ask why not?"

"Because you will be in great danger."

"From whom?"

"From the Persians, my countrymen; they have determined that there shall be no Roman garrisons east of the Euphrates, and Nisibis *must* fall."

"But that remains to be seen; Romans are Romans."

"And Persians are Persians, but we will not dispute; I can only assure you that Nisibis will be besieged within a few days, if it is not already assailed, and that the feeling of animosity which King Sapor and his forces bear to Rome, is so great, that there will be little mercy granted."

"It is not the custom of Rome to seek mercy," replied Æmilius.

"Nor to give it either; and for that reason you are the only Roman I would spare, were the whole

nation in my power; but pardon me, I keep forgetting all that I owe to you. Do take my advice and return to Antioch, or wherever your home may be. I tell you the chances are all on our side, and that you will find no safety in Mesopotamia."

"If I find my death there, I must proceed," said Æmilius, "I bear letters to Nisibis, which I am pledged to deliver with my own hand."

"Well, if it is a question of honour I cannot oppose you longer, only remember Crassus."

They travelled some distance in silence, both seemingly absorbed in thought, until they reached the brink of the river, a broad and rapid stream, flowing at this point through a level plain.

But towards the north-west a chain of mountains appeared, and indistinct glimpses were obtained of another mighty range, due east.

"When we reach those mountains our roads separate," said the young Persian.

"But, meanwhile, how are we to cross the river?" replied Æmilius.

"Look," said the other, "do you not see that thin smoke arising near the spot where those northern mountains appear to rise from the stream? there is a small village there where we shall find a ferry."

"You know this neighbourhood, then?"

"My acquaintance with it is of recent date, still I expect to obtain another horse in yonder village."

About noon they reached the spot, a collection of small mean houses, chiefly inhabited by guides, and those who ministered to the necessities of travellers.

The immediate neighbourhood was fertile, and food seemed abundant.

The inhabitants evidently knew the young Persian; they received the travellers with great respect, providing a serviceable horse, and offering every hospitality.

Æmilius and his companion did ample justice to the meal set before them; no one sat at table with them, but some members of the household waited behind with every mark of respect.

Their meal ended, a large ferry-boat was brought to the shore, they entered leading their horses; the boat was rapidly punted across the stream, and a few minutes only were consumed in the passage of the river.

Landing on the opposite side they pursued their course over a district of fertile pastures, undiversified by trees or other vegetation, until they reached the mountains in the east, and ascended a pass between two prominent peaks.

Beyond the summit of the pass their roads divided; two routes, one leading to the north-east, the other to the south-east, lay before them.

"Here, I fear, we must part," said the young Persian; "may I not ask the name of my deliverer?"

"Æmilius, the son of Cornelius. May I not ask yours in return?"

"My name is Chosroes, I may not yet tell you the name of my father, if we meet again at Nisibis I will tell you his also, but I wish I could persuade you not to go there."

"But it seems *you* are going."

"Not immediately; permit me to give you one parting gift—this ring; promise me to wear it on your finger, and to show it if you should ever fall into the power of my countrymen."

"I accept the token with pleasure; but will you not tell me more?"

"Not now; farewell; thanks for the great service you have rendered me. You are going into danger, perhaps at the call of honour; it may be my turn to be the preserver should we meet again."

They parted, Æmilius taking the northward of the two routes.

We have not time and space to describe his course for the next few days in detail. He visited Carrhæ,—the Charran of Scripture, the first resting place of Abraham during his migration from Chaldea,—left the letters intrusted to his care, then turned northwards to Edessa, and, fulfilling his mission there, resumed his course towards his final destination, hearing, from time to time, as he advanced, alarming rumours of the approach of the Persians under Artabanus.

This Artabanus, they told him at the little inn where he rested on the second night from Edessa, was not a Persian but an Egyptian, or something like it; he had entered the Persian service very young, and risen from rank to rank by daring deeds, by utter heedlessness of danger, until, in a higher rank, his wonderful capacity for command, and consummate military skill, had become so apparent, that he was now the leader of the Persian host, and the chosen favourite of the warlike Sapor. To all this was added the report that Nisibis was threatened, and that Sapor himself could not be far distant.

On the following day these rumours were confirmed; Nisibis would doubtless be surrounded shortly; Artabanus was leading a chosen body of troops to attack it.

In the evening the inn, where Æmilius again rested, was crowded by fugitives from that town and its vicinity, hastening westward to Carrhæ and Edessa, destined in their turn to fall beneath the conquering sword of Sapor.

Æmilius rose early on the morrow, and travelled all day with great speed, hoping to reach Nisibis before the Persian host surrounded it, if, indeed, the rumours he heard were true. Passing through the plains of Mygdonia, of which province Nisibis was the chief city, he saw the giant range of the Masian mountains gradually become more distinct in the northern horizon, and at last he approached the long ascent which stretched upwards to the summit of the range of hills which lay between him and the city. Here he reached the spot where the direct road from Carrhæ to Nisibis joined that upon which he had travelled, the roads uniting in the midst of a thick wood. Happening to pause at this spot, he heard the footfall of a horse approaching from Carrhæ, and while he lingered, the rider and horse drew near and came fully into sight; when to his surprise and vexation he beheld the individual he had met at Antioch, and again in the desert,—Milo, the Greek.

On his part, Milo appeared equally surprised.

"Is it you, Lucullus," he exclaimed, "I little expected to meet you this side the Styx; how did you escape?"

"Escape!" said Æmilius.

"Yes; were you not with the caravan when the Arabs attacked it? No; I had forgotten; you were lost the afternoon immediately preceding."

"The caravan attacked!"

"Yes, by those same Arabs who visited us the

first night, and who came back at last in threefold numbers, and completely gained the day; they attacked us in the dead of the night, and only a few of us who had very fleet horses escaped, while those gentry were intent upon plunder."

Æmilius was silent. What was, then, that voice he heard, which imitated the tones of his mother? Was it sent in mercy?

"But, tell me, then," said Milo, "how did you escape?"

Æmilius repeated the story with which our readers are familiar.

"Wonderful," said Milo; "those deserts are dreadful places. I have traversed them often, and could tell many strange things about them; but we must now talk of business. You are bound for Nisibis?"

"I am very anxious to reach it immediately."

"We may be there by nightfall; it is visible from the summit of the hill we are ascending."

They rode forward in silence, Æmilius meditating upon the best means of getting rid of his companion, who, he feared, might denounce him to the authorities at Nisibis; but there seemed no means of escaping his attentions, and he felt he must now trust to chance, or rather to Providence.

They gained the summit. Before them lay a beautiful scene,—Nisibis, her tremendous fortifications bathed in the light of the setting sun, the lofty mountains to the north and north-east, and the verdant plains towards the south, where the Mygdonius flowed on its course to the Araxes that their mingled waters, joining the mighty Euphrates, might lave the walls of distant Babylon.

A level plain of considerable extent intervened,

between the foot of the hill on which our travellers stood and the walls of the city, clothed with verdant grass. But at the present moment lines of white were rapidly extending themselves over its surface, and encircling the city.

They were the tents of the Persian host.

CHAPTER VI.

ARTABANUS.

BEFORE proceeding further in our tale, it is necessary to pause, in order to furnish the reader with some information concerning the Persians, who were besieging the city of Nisibis.

In the fifth century before Christ, Xerxes invaded Europe with two million men, most of whom left their bones in the soil they vainly hoped to conquer, while their unhappy leader retired from the scene of his misfortunes in an open boat, leaving the wrecks of his gallant vessels strewn upon the Attic shores.

Two centuries after, Alexander the Great invaded Persia with thirty thousand soldiers, and completely subdued that immense empire, the population appearing defenceless before Macedonian valour, as a flock of sheep invaded by wolves.

Five centuries of bondage awaited the unhappy Persians; firstly under the Seleucidæ, the descendants of Seleucus, one of Alexander's generals; and finally under the Parthians, who drove the effeminate Greeks, unworthy of their ancestors, from all the provinces of Upper Asia, at the same time in which the Roman arms subdued Asia

Minor, and fixed the temporary limit of their empire at Mount Taurus.

The dominion of the Parthians extended from the frontiers of Syria to those of India; but it fell in its turn, and the Persian monarchy revived upon its ashes.

The last king of the Parthians was named Artaban; in his army was a common soldier bearing the once mighty name of Artaxerxes, and, as tradition reported, actually descended from the line of Cyrus.

He rose from step to step by his daring valour, until his rapid rise excited the apprehensions of the Parthian king, and his death was determined upon; then he threw off the mask, and claimed the throne by virtue of his royal descent. His countrymen rose at his call; the Parthians were defeated in three great battles, in the last of which Artaban was slain, the spirit of the nation for ever broken, and Artaxerxes proclaimed king.

His kingdom was nearly identical with modern Persia, for Rome had pushed her conquests far beyond Mount Taurus and had wrested Syria and the whole territory west of the Euphrates from the Parthian grasp, and finally, only ten years before the fall of the Parthian monarchy, subdued Mesopotamia and sent Abgarus, its last ruler, in chains to Rome.

Prudence might have led Artaxerxes to rest content with the limits of the later Parthia, but he fancied himself born to restore the empire of Cyrus, and he sent a haughty message to Rome.

Four hundred Persians, tall and beautiful, in splendid apparel, and mounted upon fine horses, were sent to command the Romans to rest

content with Europe, and to leave Asia to the Persians.

War immediately followed with varying success; the Romans, under Alexander Severus, penetrated Persia and won several battles, but finally retreated in confusion into Mesopotamia, which Artaxerxes in turn was utterly unable to subdue.

He died after a glorious reign of fourteen years, leaving his designs upon Rome and his hatred of her name as a heritage to his son, Sapor, a son not unworthy of so great a father, and in whom the dying sire fancied he saw the Cyrus of the future, who should drive the Roman eagles from Asia.

Many years passed in desultory warfare, before any important blow was struck, but, at the end of a long struggle, Sapor subdued Armenia, then in alliance with Rome, having previously procured the assassination of its lawful king, and while the Armenians wearied Rome with supplications for aid, advanced into Mesopotamia, and laid siege to the town of Nisibis, which was defended by a strong Roman garrison.

We will now resume our tale.

Æmilius and Milo gazed upon the Persian tents which seemed to increase in number and extent even while they gazed, and for a moment the heart of the former sank within him, as this apparently insurmountable obstacle interposed itself between him and his destination.

But there was no time for hesitation; the path between them and the gate was not yet fully occupied, and Æmilius thought that by putting his wearied horse to its utmost speed, he might pene-

trate the ranks of the foe, and reach the gates, before they could anticipate his purpose.

He turned to Milo.

"Are you bound to reach the city?"

"I am."

"Will you dare all, and make a dash for it?"

"I will."

"Then follow me."

And he gave the reins to his horse; the gallant animal seemed to rise to the occasion, and galloped down the descent; they reached the plain, and now, Æmilius, who had hitherto withheld the spur, pressed the steed to its utmost power: they cleared the space between the base of the hill and the Persian tents, and Æmilius directed his course towards an apparent opening of great extent.

Suddenly a large number of the Persians arose from a newly dug trench, which in his hurry Æmilius had not observed; they let fly their arrows, one of them penetrated the body of the horse, and the gallant steed fell with its rider.

Before he could arise, or draw his sword in his defence, he was a prisoner.

He was addressed by the chief officer of the party, in their native dialect, of which he did not understand a syllable. He knew that he was in great danger, and already, in obedience to a signal from the officer, one of the party had drawn his scimetar in a significant manner, when he started back and pointed to the hand of the prisoner.

Æmilius suddenly remembered the ring, the large signet upon which had attracted the observation of the Persian.

Again questions were asked him which he could not understand; but he was evidently considered

to be entitled to greater respect. In obedience to the signs made by the leader, Æmilius followed him towards the interior of the camp.

He looked round to see what had become of Milo, but he had disappeared.

They led him nearly a thousand paces, and then had arrived immediately in front of a splendid tent, from which the royal standard of Persia floated, and Æmilius prepared himself for an interview with the fierce Sapor, which might have a tragical ending, and he prepared himself for death, commending his soul to God. Yet he did not entirely give up hope.

The officer entered within the tent; returned, and throwing aside the curtain which veiled the entrance, bid Æmilius enter.

Seated in the Persian fashion upon a couch before a table, covered with maps and plans of the ill-fated city, sat, not Sapor, but his general, Artabanus; around him stood two or three officers of rank, and to the intense surprise of Æmilius he beheld Milo amongst them.

Milo stood there without the least appearance of restraint, and was evidently engaged in deep and confidential communication with Artabanus; he, too, started when he saw Æmilius, and something very like a blush rose to his cheeks.

For a time no one noticed Æmilius, until at last the consultation in which Milo shared had ended, and then Artabanus faced the prisoner.

Æmilius gazed upon the face of this renowned chieftain, who in an enemy's country had gained such distinction, for it was evident that he belonged to a race of very different type from the Persian.

He was very dark, and seemed rather to owe his birth to the races of Northern Africa, than to those of Asia; his massive forehead, and the formation of his jaw, told of singular tenacity of purpose and dogged resolution.

He gazed intently upon Æmilius, and then bid all the spectators leave the tent, and suffer him to be alone with the prisoner. When they were gone he addressed his captive in Latin, with scarcely a perceptible imperfection of accent,—"Your name?"

"Æmilius," was the reply, for concealment seemed needless.

"Your birthplace?"

"Antioch."

"Your father?"

"Cornelius."

"Are you aware of the danger you have incurred? that your life is in our power?"

"I am."

"Why have you striven to penetrate our ranks."

"I sought to reach Nisibis."

"Your object?"

"To carry certain messages from Rome."

"Written or verbal?"

"Written."

"Let me have them."

"I may not surrender them but with life."

"How came you by the signet ring you wear?"

"It was given me by a Persian whose life I saved."

Artabanus at once appeared interested, and gained full particulars concerning the event which had occurred in the desert; then he spoke in a gentler tone.

Let me give you one piece of advice; return to the place whence you came; do not enter Nisibis."

"Is it in my power to enter it?"

"It is: I will give you free passage to its gates, once within them you must consider that you have received life for life, and that you have no further claim upon us."

"I *must* go if it costs me my life; it has become my duty, but I thank you for your kindness."

"Are you the cousin of the legatus of Antioch?"

"I am," said Æmilius, much surprised.

"When did you see him last?"

"Not since I was a boy. I have been a long exile from home."

"Indeed: what harm have you done?"

"None."

"Then why have you been banished?"

Æmilius looked fixedly at the speaker; he began to recognise something in the voice, and even in the face, which was not wholly unfamiliar to him; then he remembered that Milo was in the camp, and not as a prisoner, and while he thought that he comprehended the general's sources of information, dark suspicions of treachery towards Rome filled his mind.

But Artabanus awaited his answer, which Æmilius for the first time hesitated to give.

"My humble affairs," he replied, "can hardly interest you; it was my father's will."

"Do you know Milo?" he asked.

"We travelled together."

"You may go to Nisibis immediately; once there, your task will be to preserve your own life from famine and the sword; if you have any influence at Nisibis, you had better use it to persuade

the governor to surrender, otherwise we can shew no mercy; he can hardly hope to make a successful defence."

And he summoned an officer, into whose care he committed Æmilius, with instructions to restore his baggage, to find him another horse, and to conduct him safely beyond the Persian lines.

Arriving at the gates, after his guard had left him, he was immediately challenged by the sentinels, detained till the arrival of an officer, his passport examined, questioned strictly, and finally admitted.

The governor was making his rounds at this moment, and paused as he saw the stranger enter.

"Whence come you?" he asked, as he paused with his band of attendants.

"From Rome, my lord."

"Do you bear messages?"

"Only for private individuals."

"How did you get through the ranks of the enemy?"

Æmilius briefly explained.

The governor reflected for a few minutes, and then spoke:

"You must come and see me to-morrow; I have many questions to ask concerning Rome; meanwhile, where do you lodge?"

Æmilius gave him the name of the street.

"To-morrow, then, at the third hour, if these Persians do not prevent, I shall expect you."

There was something in the voice and manner of the governor, which awoke early recollections in the mind of Æmilius, but it was not till they parted and he walked away, that the last scene in his home life rushed upon his memory, and he knew Lentulus.

He departed to seek the residence of the bishop. It was a humble residence in the interior of the city. He had looked forward to this meeting with great joy, for he knew that the newly appointed prelate was Cyril, his old friend, and the friend of Eteocles, now in his old age, invested with the government of this outpost of Christianity.

He could hardly contain his emotion when at last he met his friend, and gazed upon those dear and venerable features; well did he remember the first time he had ever seen them on the night when he escaped from the wolves, and, with yet more vivid emotion, did he remember the scene in the forest, when Cyril had been indeed the messenger of God to his soul; and, perhaps most vividly of all, the meeting on the night before the martyrdom of his friend.

And then there were questions for Cyril to ask. He had to learn all that had passed during the seven years of the absence of his son in the Faith, concluding with the heroic deaths of those Champions of the Faith, Xystus and Laurence. After which Æmilius informed his friend that the governor had ordered him to repair to his palace in the morning.

"He probably seeks news from Rome of a different kind from those you have given me; Lentulus feels himself a lone exile long banished from the world. You know that he is an old friend of your father."

"I had forgotten him till now," said Æmilius; we never met save on one occasion, and happily he would not remember me; it was the evening when I left home."

"There is little danger to apprehend from him,"

said the bishop; "he is one of the school of the stoics, and is in principle opposed to all persecution; he would only act on the imperial edict if *forced* to do so, and it has not even reached this extreme limit of the Roman dominions."

"Then are there many of the faithful here?"

"A few hundreds, and amongst them many of the bravest soldiers of the garrison; indeed, the only danger we have to apprehend here, is one which we share in common with all our countrymen."

"You mean the siege?"

"It has but commenced," said Cyril, "and it will probably become a blockade, for the town is too strong to be easily taken; when our numbers are thinned by famine and by pestilence, then the assault may be made with some hope of success."

"Meanwhile, I must remain here, father, and you will find me work to do in the cause of the Church."

On the following morning, Æmilius presented himself at the prætorium, and was at once admitted into the presence of Lentulus. He could not but acknowledge in the latter a worthy type of those heroes whose memories he had been taught to revere in his boyhood. The noble forehead, the aquiline nose, the scanty locks of grey, the tall stature, and noble air of repose which sat on his features, all seemed to mark Lentulus as one worthy to have been the friend of his father.

The governor was seated before a table whereon were letters which seemed utterly to absorb his attention, so that for some minutes he did not appear to notice his visitor. At last he looked up, and, asking Æmilius courteously to pardon his inatten-

tion, he put some general questions concerning Rome and the state of politics there, and appeared to take great interest in the replies. He questioned him at length about Macrianus, whose influence with Valerian appeared to cause the questioner great uneasiness; also about the state of affairs in Antioch, and concerning the new legatus. But when he proceeded further in his enquiries concerning Antioch, the embarrassment of Æmilius became visible, and seemed to strike a sudden chord in his mind; he paused, looked intently at him for a few seconds, and then appeared lost in meditation. At last, he asked—

"Have we not met before?"

"We have," said Æmilius, determined to conceal himself no longer, but yet speaking with a painful effort.

"Where?"

"At the house of my father."

"You are the very image of one of my earliest and best loved friends: your voice recalls his; your features are his, as I knew him in the spring time of life. He lost a son in a very sad manner when I was visiting him in Antioch; you cannot be that son!"

"I am," said Æmilius, unable to refrain from tears.

"Then you are a Christian?"

"Yes, by God's great mercy."

"It has not been a mercy to your father, who lost his only son through that superstition; he believes you dead; there was a report that the vessel, in which you were discovered to have sailed, was shipwrecked."

"It was, but I escaped."

"And you have never communicated with your father?"

"It would be useless; my faith is dear to me as my life, it is the anchor of my soul; I love my father, my mother, my sister, deeply as ever, but I have a yet higher allegiance."

"What allegiance can be higher than that of a son to his father?"

"That of a creature to its Creator,—the redeemed to the Redeemer,—the slave to the Lord Who shed His Blood that he, the criminal, might live, whose life was justly forfeited."

"I have no hatred against Christianity; there is much that is beautiful in the system, as I learned from a Christian philosopher, and, like Tiberius, I would admit Christ into the number of the gods."

"Our Lord claims an undivided sway."

"And that claim has been fatal to His pretensions. But we will not dwell upon it longer; I can believe that a Christian, especially if he be a Cornelius, will be a good citizen, and an occasion has now arrived to test it. We are in great need of Romans to defend the honour of their country, to save her from disgrace; you have not yet served; will you fight in your country's cause, and take your first lessons in arms from me? I suspect you will not be the only Christian in the ranks."

"I will gladly do so; it will but be rendering to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's."

"Then sup with me to-night, and I will assign you your new duties; and it may lead to results which will reconcile your supposed duties to Christ with your real ones to your parents."

CHAPTER VII.

ROMAN AND PERSIAN.

THE town of Nisibis was the capital of the eastern district of Mesopotamia, and was situated upon the river Mygdonius, near the base of the mighty mountains known as the Masian range.

It was a town of considerable antiquity, and from the time of its conquest by the Romans, became one of the most considerable outposts of their empire towards the east, sharing the fate of such towns, in frequently experiencing the utmost horrors of war, as it was taken or retaken by Romans, Parthians, or Persians.

The view towards the north and north-west from the citadel of the town embraced the giant peaks of the Masian mountains, before mentioned, which separated Mesopotamia from Armenia; but in the south and south-east, where the waters of the Mygdonius flowed to join the Euphrates, the country was more open and fertile, rich in pasture-land and cattle.

The town was defended upon the left by the river, which washed the base of its walls; and towards the north and west by the precipitous formation of the rocky soil on which it was built; while on the less protected portions, massive walls, flanked by towers

of the most solid proportions, frowned upon the advancing foe.

In the heart of the city upon a rocky eminence, stood the prætorium, which was also the citadel, serving for the purposes of the administration of justice, and the business of the government in time of peace, and promising a last refuge, in case of extreme need, in the time of war.

The defence of this important outpost was committed to a single legion, numbering as usual about six thousand well-disciplined soldiers; the defence of the Euphrates was ordinarily committed to eight of these legions, six of whom were posted in Syria, but at this period three legions were in Mesopotamia at the posts of Carrhæ, Edessa, and Nisibis respectively.

This force was, however, very inadequate to the exigencies of the occasion, for the army with which Sapor crossed the frontier, must have exceeded a hundred thousand soldiers, the greater portion of whom were now besieging Nisibis under the command of Artabanus.

The preparations of the Persians were only completed towards the evening of the day on which Æmilius had the interview with the governor, described in the last chapter, but the movements amongst their forces indicated their determination to attempt to carry the city by assault, and the whole garrison was under arms.

Æmilius was attached to the staff of the governor, in order that he might discharge the duties, which devolve upon aides-de-camp in these modern days, and bear messages from post to post.

As he passed through the streets of the city, he noticed the fear which seemed to have fallen upon

the inhabitants, and thought it a sign of ill omen; women were clasping their little ones convulsively in their arms, soldiers straining their wives to their bosoms in what might prove the last fond embrace, ere they hastened to their posts.

The trumpets of the garrison sounded to arms as Æmilius reached the summit of the wall, and beheld the assailants, in numbers which appeared countless, hastening to the assault.

The point towards which they directed their exertions was the gate, by which Æmilius had entered on the previous evening, while another body was advancing towards a similar gate on the southern side of the city.

Æmilius beheld them approach without fear, he felt he was but doing his duty, and could leave the result to God, yet as the sun shone upon the imposing array, and its beams were reflected back from the armour and weapons of the advancing host, it was a sight to make the defenders tremble.

Arriving near the walls they paused, and showered missiles from their whole line upon the defenders; so deadly was the shower that many fell, yet no man could leave his post, for, under cover of the discharge, materials were brought forward to bridge the ditch, and form a resting-place for scaling ladders; faggots were thrown in rapidly; hurdles placed upon them, and ladders planted upon the hurdles, which were of close wicker work.

The Romans, amidst a perfect shower of darts, arrows, and stones, to which they could but make a feeble reply, waited until the scaling ladders appeared, and the foe scrambled up; then they displayed marvellous valour; many ladders were seized by instruments contrived for the purpose, and hurled back

with their living burdens upon those who were beneath, while those assailants, who reached the summit, paid the penalty in every instance with life.

Æmilius fought under the eye of Lentulus, and exerted himself with so much bravery, as to gain the warm praise of the general.

"Well done, son of my old friend!" he said, when the foe had been repulsed for a season and the defenders were resting from their toils, "it is not difficult to see that the spirit of your ancestors is yours also, and that the blood of the Cornelii has not degenerated in your person."

At that moment a fearful tumult arose within a short distance.

"They are attacking the gate," said Lentulus, "follow."

And, leaving about half the defenders of the wall to guard against another assault on that point, he hastened towards the gate to reanimate its defenders by his presence.

It was a fearful scene, the Persians had bridged over the ditch where the bridge had been previously broken down, first by faggots and hurdles, and then by dead bodies forming a hideous heap over which the survivors rushed to assault the gate.

And here axes and hammers failing against the solid woodwork, they had piled faggots and brushwood to which they had set fire, and the flames arose as the governor appeared.

The Persians raising a shout of triumph withdrew a few paces to watch the progress of the flames, showering their missiles upon the Romans who strove to pour water from above upon the pile.

In spite of all their exertions, the flames did their work, and the gates were evidently yielding.

Lentulus gave his orders with clearness and decision, and led a body of his choicest troops to the narrow passage between flanking walls, upon which the gateway opened; it could be defended by a few resolute men against hundreds, or equally well against thousands.

The gates fell, and as the flames leaped into the air, the Persians rushed forward, scattering the embers on all sides, and entered the narrow passage described, to find themselves opposed by Lentulus in person with his choicest troops. Æmilius was by his side.

And now the superiority of Roman discipline and Roman arms was apparent; before the straight two-edged blades Persian after Persian went down, while cries of "Habet," "Habet," resounded as the Romans, with grim mirth, saw their adversaries fall.

The ground was soon strewn with corpses, and the discomfiture of the Persians was completed as their enemies showered down beams, huge stones, and finally burning sand, which penetrated to the very bone, from the walls on each side; fresh troops entered to share the fate of their predecessors, until the wall was literally choked up with the bodies of the dead, and there was little need of a gate.

Æmilius was despatched by the general to make the circuit of the walls, and bring the report of their state. He found that the Persians had but intended the attack upon the other side as a feint to distract the attention of the defenders, and that as nightfall approached they retreated on all sides towards their camp, wearied and dispirited, to plot more mischief against the city.

Æmilius returned that night to the house of the bishop; it was to be his abode during his residence

in the city; and was received with open arms by Cyril.

"I thank God, my dear son," he said, "that He has preserved you amidst the perils of the day, and I pray Him still to extend His protecting Arm over you; rest in peace this night, and thank Him that we have still a roof over our heads, or life left to praise His Holy Name.

The following day the Persians appeared to have relinquished all design of carrying the city by assault; all day long they laboured within sight of the garrison, excavating a deep trench, round that part of the city not encompassed by the river; erecting a wall, and raising towers upon it, so as completely to exclude all hope of relief from the besieged. Crossing the river they drew up similar lines of fortification, at the distance of a bow-shot from the shore, and connected the extremities with the stream, over which they threw bridges, so as to keep up their communication with the opposite bank.

And thus day after day passed by, during which the Romans made many desperate sallies and burnt several of their newly-erected towers, but these sallies cost many lives, and the Romans had few men to spare. Æmilius took part in some of these struggles, and greatly rose in favour with Lentulus, who appeared to contract a strong partiality for him, and often conversed with him about his father, concerning whom he told many tales illustrating the matchless valour which had procured him the flattering appellation of "Cornelius the Brave," during the deadly struggles with the fierce Germans of the Rhine and Danube.

But yet the condition of the besieged was a critical one; it is true that they had provision for many

months, but then it became a question of time, and they felt that endurance must bring victory to their foes; unless succour arrived from Rome, or at the least from the legions in Syria.

Day after day Lentulus ascended to the summit of the highest tower of the citadel, frequently accompanied by Æmilius, and strained his gaze towards the summit of the pass by which alone succour could arrive.

From that elevated point he could mark the whole circuit of the enemy's operations; their numbers appeared to be continually on the increase, their stores of provisions were inexhaustible, for they had the whole country behind them, and the general could see the waggons and teams bringing in the produce of the surrounding district.

On one of these occasions he turned to Æmilius, and said,—

"Do you mark the spot where they keep their stores? If the worst comes to the worst, we must hazard a sortie to attack those granaries, but it will cost many lives."

"I will volunteer to be one of the assailants," replied Æmilius.

Lentulus looked on him with approving eye, then continued:—"There is no immediate want, we can last many months yet, upon our present stock of provisions; but the one thing we need is to send a messenger to Rome by way of Carrhæ and Antioch."

"How could he pass the lines?"

"Look," said the governor, "and consider; their rampart, mounds, and trenches have barred all openings but one."

At first Æmilius could hardly comprehend his meaning, until he suddenly divined it.

"The river," he said.

"Yes," said Lentulus, "favoured by the darkness a boat might drop down the stream and escape their sentinels."

"I know the way to Carrhæ," said Æmilius.

"But I need not send you, for I have just found a man who has reached us by the river and is willing to return by it; he has brought despatches from Antioch; Eucrates, the legatus, writes word that there is not sufficient force in Syria and Mesopotamia united, to save us; but that if I represent our desperate case by letter to Valerian, he may possibly invade Persia in person, and roll back the stream of war upon the lands of our foes; he urges me to lose no time."

"Did he know that the city was already invested."

"No; the messenger has been delayed a long time, from inability to traverse the Persian lines; he found a skiff at last, and passed them in safety in the dark."

"He must be a daring fellow; I should like to see him."

"You will find him below; let us descend, he awaits me in my rooms; and you may send any messages you like to Antioch or Rome by him."

They descended, entered the governor's apartments, and Æmilius recognised Milo.

All the suspicions attaching to the character of this man recurred to the mind of Æmilius, and Milo himself appeared somewhat taken aback, as he perceived his fellow-traveller.

"You have met Milo before," said Lentulus, observing their looks.

"We were fellow-travellers across the desert," said Milo, anticipating the reply of Æmilius, "but our

friend was more fortunate than I; he was released at once, and I was detained in the camp of the Persians, till I made my escape by the river."

This was a somewhat different account from that he had given before; and it staggered Lentulus.

"We will return to you in a short time," he said, "meanwhile I have some business to settle with our friend here."

"Where have you met this man before?" he asked of Æmilius when alone.

Æmilius related the whole history of his previous intercourse with Milo, concluding with the scene in the tent of Artabanus.

"It is indeed very suspicious," said Lentulus, "and I distrust Eucrates; I cannot think why Valerian appointed a Greek to rule over Syria; it is all the doing of Macrianus, and I only trust that there is no treachery in the affair; meanwhile, I will only make such a reply to Eucrates, and through him to Valerian, as can do us no harm, even if it fall into hostile hands."

Æmilius left for the residence of Cyril, and, when night arrived, Milo departed with the messages for Antioch and Rome. It is needless to say that he was not intercepted, but permitted to depart for Antioch, after his messages had been inspected by Artabanus, from whom also he bore letters for Eucrates and Macrianus.

Day after day passed, week after week, with the same outward features, the winter was far milder in Mesopotamia than Armenia, or the Persians could not have kept their station. But when the spring, and with it Lent set in, there was little need of bidding Christians to fast, for the whole garrison was reduced to half rations, and

the inhabitants were in some instances literally starving.

No tidings had arrived since Milo had departed, and it had become a mere question of time between Romans and Persians,—a question to be speedily solved.

"Æmilius," said Lentulus, one day, "will you volunteer to join a hazardous enterprise?"

"If you wish me to do so."

"We must make a sally, storm the Persian granaries, or die; if we succeed I should think they will give up the siege in despair, or, at least, we may then safely await the arrival of Valerian."

"And if he never comes!"

"Oh, he *will* come, or at least his legions will; and then we shall teach Artabanus a lesson."

"Have you completed the plans?"

"Yes; the granaries lie without the trench, where it joins the river, and just beyond the southern bridge they have built; I have watched the waggons bringing corn day by day from our fields, and depositing it there, while we are starving; and we must get it before they have time to consume it themselves."

"When do we make the sally?"

"To-night at the third hour."

Æmilius returned to prepare himself for the desperate work which lay before him; he had communicated that morning, and felt no fear of death, for the days passed at Nisibis had been both profitable and happy to him; he took an affectionate farewell of his old friend the bishop, fearing that it might be the last, and reported himself to Lentulus just after sunset.

Early summer had arrived, and the night was mild and balmy, but there was no moon, and the boats were collected by the light of the stars.

About a hundred desperate men embarked, determined to conquer or die; the gates were opened, and another larger band marched so far as they safely could without arousing the sentinels, halting on the river bank without the enemy's outposts, so as to be able to support their friends in the hour of need.

The hundred hoped to succeed in landing without the works without being perceived, to attack and carry the stores of provisions, and to reach their boats without discovery. Silently they dropped down the stream, and Æmilius, who was amongst the number, felt that awful suspense which must weigh heavily even upon the bravest at such a moment. Two of his companions in the same boat were members of the flock of Cyril; for, as we have seen, there were many Christians in the garrison, and they commended themselves to God in silence. They floated down the stream without using their oars; they passed their comrades, drawn up on the bank under the personal command of Lentulus. In a few moments the low bridge crossing the river, which the Persians had built, was in sight. There was but just room to pass beneath, and they were already in the shade of the arch when their progress was suddenly stopped. Feeling their way in perfect silence, they discovered that a massive iron chain had been drawn across the river at this spot by the foe whose watch fires glowed close to them. Sabinus, the officer in charge of the party, had prepared himself for this possible event, and a huge file was speedily at work. While they were thus proceeding, all being gathered in safe concealment in the shade of the bridge, which was of considerable size; they heard voices above, and suspended their occupation.

"Did you not hear a strange noise beneath," said

a voice, in the Persian dialect, which only a few present comprehended.

"It has ceased now."

"I heard nothing; it must have been the imagination."

And the speakers passed on.

The work was continued until the huge chain fell into the water, and the boats passed under the arch. They proceeded about a hundred yards further and then landed; the whole body collected on the shore, and, drawing their swords, advanced towards the buildings which they knew served as store-houses. The sentinel posted near had hardly time to challenge ere he was pierced through with a dart; his comrade next in position shared the same fate, and crowbars were freely used to force open the doors, which had not been framed in the expectation of attack. They yielded, the Romans entered, and feasted their eyes upon the stores of provisions. A watch fire burned not far off, but they were unobserved; it was the dead of the night, and the Persians were sleeping as they lay extended around it.

The Romans bore barrel after barrel, sack after sack, to their boats, and despatched the first load while half the number waited upon the banks in stern anxiety, knowing that if discovered before the return of the boats they had no means of retreat, and could but sell their lives dearly. But all was silent; the boats returned, were loaded again, and the triumphant Romans returned homewards.

They repassed the arch in safety, when suddenly a fierce shout was raised; the Persian guard, in making their rounds, had discovered the depredations. All was confusion; the Romans rowed up the river with all speed, but the whole camp was now

in commotion from end to end, and no Persian yet knew how the plunderers had escaped.

Numerous bands of Persians were hastening to scour the country, some towards the plain, thinking, in the absence of any breach in their works, that the plunderers could not come from the town ; others, under skilful leaders, pursued the tracks which led to the gates, and one of these bands discovered the fast-retreating soldiers of Lentulus, and at the same time the boats on the river.

Loud cries were followed by the galloping of a party over the bridge, and darts from either side of the river were showered upon the fugitives, who however were close to the town ; and while Lentulus and his party, by a desperate charge, completely crushed the foe on their side of the stream, the boats reached the quay in safety, and hundreds of willing hands carried the provisions into the city.

Large reinforcements were advancing to aid the Persians ; but they only arrived in time to see Lentulus and his party retreat through the gate, leaving scores of their foes dead or wounded, and to learn that the foraging party were safe with their booty.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FATE OF NISIBIS.

THE reign of Valerian, and his son, Gallienus, who was associated with him in the government, was one of the darkest periods of the decline of the Roman empire. On all sides the barbarians were making successful incursions; the Germans of the Lower Rhine, under the name of Franks or Freemen, had ravaged Gaul, crossed the Pyrenees into Spain, laid waste the latter country also with fire and sword, and finally ended their expedition by crossing the straits and carrying their victorious arms into the Roman provinces in Africa; the Alemanni penetrated the Rhætian Alps into Lombardy, and sacked Ravenna, displaying their victorious banners within a short distance of Rome herself; the Goths, leaving the northern coasts of the Euxine, destroyed Trebizond and massacred its inhabitants, carried destruction through all the northern provinces of Asia Minor, penetrated into Greece, after burning the famous temple of Ephesus, took Athens, Thebes, Corinth, and, leaving the country in utter ruin, advanced to the coasts of Epirus, within sight of Italy.

Such a complication of calamities would have tested the resources of any nation, even of Rome in her palmiest days; but the event which caused the greatest

excitement was the Persian invasion of Mesopotamia, and the oft-declared intention of Sapor to banish Rome from Asia, and restore the empire of Cyrus.

Consequently, in the course of these calamities, Valerian was persuaded to depart from Rome, leading the flower of the army, with the intention of checking the tide of Persian conquest, and humbling the haughty Sapor, leaving the defence of the Rhine and Danube to his son Gallienus.

Macrianus, who had chiefly influenced the decision of the emperor, accompanied him in person, encouraging him in his heroic resolution; for it was indeed a mighty enterprise to be undertaken by an old man like Valerian already in his seventieth year.

Little did the emperor suspect how deadly a serpent he nourished in his bosom, one who had sold himself entirely to the foe. A member of the Magi, or Persian priesthood, the whole aim of his life had been, like that of Hannibal, to humble the pride of Rome, but, unlike Hannibal, he did his work as a treacherous friend, not as a manly and valiant foe.

During the progress of Valerian through Greece and Asia Minor the projects of the Goths were for awhile suspended, and the fated regions enjoyed a treacherous calm,—the calm before the storm which swept over whole provinces, as we have already related, from Pontus to Epirus.

Passing the Cilician gates, he rested for a short period at Antioch, the guest of Eucrates in the legatine palace.

Like his master and patron, Macrianus, Eucrates professed the most slavish subserviency to Rome, and offered adulation to the emperor as to a deity. All the resources of the city were taxed to do honour to his presence; there were shows in the amphitheatre,

in which a large number of Christians were given as food to the beasts, and the enthusiasm of the inhabitants rose to the highest degree; they greeted Valerian with cheers and acclamations which on their part were probably sincere, and, in the name of the whole province of Syria, thanked him for the heroic self-devotion with which he advanced to deliver them from their foes, the terror of whose name had reached them and made them tremble; for Syria was the next province to Mesopotamia, and Antioch would probably share the fate of the cities east of the great river.

A grand banquet was given to the emperor after the shows of the amphitheatre, in the great dining-hall of the palace; all the aristocracy of the province had been invited, and the resources of the legatus were taxed to the utmost. Cornelius was there; he had known Valerian in early days, and etiquette would not suffer Eucrates to omit his name from the list of visitors, while loyalty would not permit Cornelius to decline the invitation.

We shall not describe the banquet; one such description has already been given in these pages, and the reader has only to amplify it so as to suit the magnitude of the present occasion.

But there was one feature of the entertainment entirely novel, of an ingenuity peculiar to the young legatus. Towards its conclusion, the hall was suddenly darkened, and the windows thrown open to admit a flood of light from the gardens, where, in accordance with the pattern set by Nero, several victims, attached to stakes, smeared over with pitch, and surrounded by combustible materials, were flaming to illuminate the night.

A dead silence fell upon the assembly as they gazed.

"I have provided these spectacles as the fittest tribute I can offer to one so faithful to the immortal gods as your majesty," said Eucrates.

The emperor was for a time silent; he did not even gaze a second time at the sight offered him. At last he spoke.

"I admit the sad necessity for these punishments, but they give me no personal gratification. I sorrow to think that the victims should be subjects,—the disobedient children of Rome."

"Unnatural children, my liege,—parricides!" said Macrianus. "They are, indeed, slaying their country,—the cause of every evil which has fallen upon us."

"Close the windows," said the emperor, "and let us change the subject."

Cornelius, who fully coincided with the feelings expressed by the emperor, was greatly relieved by the closing of the windows; but yet the consciousness of the scene so close to them seemed still to attract the thoughts of the assembly; many were struck by the stern fortitude of the sufferers, consuming in those silent funeral piles, and for awhile no one spoke.

The emperor broke the silence by addressing Cornelius.

"I regret," he said, "my old friend, that the infirmities of age prevent you from sharing the perils and glories of this campaign."

"I should willingly have offered my services," replied Cornelius, "but my infirmities, particularly my lameness, which is but of recent origin, would render them useless. An old friend of mine is at Nisibis, and willingly would I be the first to bring him succour."

"If I am too late to succour him, I can at least avenge him," said Valerian.

The banquet concluded earlier than usual, for the habits of the emperor were abstemious, and he retired to rest, intending to prosecute his journey on the morrow. Eucrates and Macrianus were speedily left alone, for the other guests separated after Valerian had retired.

So soon as they were alone, Macrianus looked his protegé fully in the face.

"The plot thickens," he said, "and the result so long desired is now secured."

"If only Sapor is victorious," replied Eucrates.

"He must be; we will secure that. Have you guides upon whom we can rely?"

"Yes; Persians who speak the Syriac dialect well, and can pass for Syrians."

"They must take care to avoid the ordinary route, and to delay the army in the desert as long as they safely can. Something may be done with the springs also; they may be poisoned by men sent in advance. I will consult with one or two clever chemists whom I can trust."

"Remember that Antioch is full of Romans, and great caution is necessary.

"I will take care. One more question,—How do the cares of government sit upon your shoulders?"

"Lightly enough; but I am in fetters under this Roman rule."

"As the satrap under Sapor it will be more pleasant doubtless. And now we must settle all these arrangements in detail."

And they consulted together until the light of dawn began to appear, and the Roman trumpets sounded for the legions to awake from their slumbers, and to prepare to resume their march.

It was a grand sight: the departure of the Roman

army from Antioch, consisting of twenty chosen legions, appearing invincible in the perfection of their discipline, their arms gleaming like silver in the morning sun. The whole population turned out to do them honour, and to wish them a safe and glorious return; and Antioch did not resume its wonted tranquility until hours had passed away, and the last stragglers had disappeared from sight on the roads leading to the desert, never, alas! to return.

They departed full of life and hope, trusting to humble the power of the haughty Sapor, and to shed renewed lustre upon the arms of Rome; to gather laurels to lay at the feet of the false gods whom they ignorantly worshipped, and their yet falser priests; but never again was the yellow Tiber to greet their vision,—never again was the capitol to resound with the acclamation, "Long live Valerian,"—never were the feet of the Prætorian guard to press the slopes of the Clivus Capitolinus in triumphant procession to the capitol.

But we must not anticipate.

The course of our tale leads us again to Nisibis. The successful sally of the garrison, and the certainty that they now possessed considerable supplies of food, raised the anger and impatience of the Persians to the highest pitch. News had, moreover, arrived that Valerian had actually left Rome, and the necessity of concentrating the Persian forces to oppose him became obvious. Under these circumstances, another assault upon the town was decided upon; but, ere risking the lives of his soldiers, Artabanus determined to have recourse to strategy and craft. He used every means to tempt the garrison to frequent sallies, plac-

ing his troops in exposed positions, and thinking himself fortunate if he succeeded in destroying a hundred of the enemy at the expense of two hundred of his own troops, knowing that inexhaustible resources were at his command, and that those of his foe were very limited indeed. Therefore, he kept the Roman garrison in constant occupation ; he gave them alarms by night, and made open attacks by day, which he knew would, for the present, be fruitless. Meanwhile, he observed some circumstances which he carefully noted.

Nisibis was fortified with consummate skill at all points but one. To the north-east of the city a precipitous rock rose from the river, and appeared to bid defiance to all attempts on the part of a foe, consequently it was only crowned by slight defences, and was defended with less diligence than usual.

Artabanus, who was well instructed in Persian lore, particularly in the events of the life of Cyrus, was inspecting his troops who manned the fortifications on the opposite side of the Mygdonius, in full view of this citadel, when he fell into a train of thought,—the circumstances under which Sardis was taken by that mighty conqueror,—the soldier's helmet rolling down the slope,—the ascent of the Persians in the darkness of the night by the road thus pointed out, and the consequent capture of the city. It dwelt upon his mind from that day, and at last his resolutions were taken, his plans formed, and he but awaited a stormy and tempestuous night.

It came at last, in the early autumn of the year ; the wind blew a hurricane ; the rain descended in torrents ; the noise and clatter caused by the storm almost precluded the possibility of the discovery of his scheme. Rafts, which had been constructed

secretly, were launched upon the river, unseen and unsuspected, and a hundred chosen men with their weapons embarked, taking with them half a dozen ladders and some strong iron pikes.

They drew up their rafts at the base of the rock, and applied a ladder. At its summit they found a crevice which they had previously observed by daylight, which served as the base for the second ladder, which was secured by driving the iron pike far into the rock and attaching the ladder to it by cords. This ladder reached the stump of a tree which projected from the rocky soil; the third, a point in the crags, from which it was possible to ascend cautiously to the base of the wall; and the fourth ladder, planted at the base, completed the arrangements of the Persians.

One by one the invaders ascended; the first who gained the summit found the defences vacant, owing to the violence of the storm, which rendered it difficult for the assailants themselves to keep their footing during their perilous ascent.

The negligence of the sentinels would, however, have been punished by death if discovered in time; but the punishment was taken out of the hands of the Roman authorities.

The Persians were led by a young chieftain, to whom they all paid profound respect, and who had chosen this post of honour and danger for himself, while Artabanus waited outside the gates of the city, so often assaulted in vain.

Led by a Persian who had once been a Roman slave in Nisibis, and who knew every turn in the city, they descended into the streets, which they found empty, the rain yet falling in torrents.

The unfortunate sentinels were surprised in the

shelter they had chosen, and cut down before they could raise the alarm, and the hostile band passed on in silence and darkness, avoiding all the chief streets; skirting the walls; until they reached the great gate undiscovered.

But here the sentinels were on the alert, in their recesses on each side of the gateway. They observed the dark shadows of the foe advancing towards the gate, and their challenge issued forth. "Who goes there?"

The assault was instantly made both within and without; taken entirely by surprise the guard could hardly sound the alarm before they were overpowered by numbers: they made a fierce and deadly struggle for life, and the cries and shouts of mortal strife alarmed the sleeping inhabitants, but before any aid could arrive the gates were forced, and the Persians poured into the devoted city.

Æmilius was sleeping that night as usual in the house of the bishop, when he was disturbed by a loud knocking at the door; jumping up hastily his ear caught the cries, shrieks, and the clash of weapons, while a fierce light glowed in upon the room, as he drew aside the curtain which veiled the window.

He comprehended at once that the town was taken; how, he could *not* comprehend: he hastened to the apartment of Cyril; the whole household was already aroused; he knelt before the bishop for his last blessing, and arming himself hastened forth.

He found a crowd of men, women, and children, —mothers clasping babes in their arms; daughters supporting aged mothers; men sustaining their loved ones,—hastening to the citadel. He thought involuntarily of the day of doom, as he gazed upon

those pallid faces, upon which from time to time fierce light flashed from the burning buildings which the foe had already fired.

He hastened onwards; the clamour of mortal strife drew nearer and nearer at each successive moment, and at last he found himself in the midst of his fellow-soldiers, slowly retreating towards the citadel, before an advancing host of the foe, who, (outnumbering them by ten to one), were driving the Romans onward, and firing the houses behind them.

The storm still raged, but even as in the fight of Trasimenus an earthquake passed unheeded, so was it now; the rain had almost ceased, but still streams of water mingled with the blood of Persian and Roman rushed down the gutters of the street, or hissed as they met the blazing ruins of some fallen building, where the very stones seemed red hot.

They were forced nearer and nearer the citadel each minute, although behind them the route was marked with blood and mangled bodies, the dead and wounded alike destined to be consumed by the advancing flames.

At last they were driven out upon the great square surrounding the fortress: they defended the openings from the different streets for a few minutes of desperate strife, and then joined with numerous other bodies of their countrymen, who were driven back from the other avenues in like manner.

At that moment Æmilius perceived Lentulus, at the head of some of his bravest warriors, striving with heroic self-devotion to keep the Persians back until the crowd of fugitives could gain the ascent leading up to the citadel. He dashed to the side of his father's friend, who gave him one approving

yet sad and pitying glance as he saw him by his side.

It was evident at once to Æmilius that the only hope for the poor fugitives who were then crossing the space, which separated them from the fortress, lay in the prowess of his fellow-warriors and his own, and with heroic self-devotion, he resigned himself, as it seemed, to death.

In the fierceness of the conflict, as he heard the cries of the wounded, the clash of swords, the shouts of Persian or Roman, all feelings and impulses seemed merged in the excitement of the conflict, in the determination to do all that man could do, and to die the death of a hero amidst the foes: well did a Christian soldier once say on the eve of mortal conflict, "Lord, if I forget Thee, do not Thou forget me."

But the supreme moment had arrived, the last of the fugitives for whom there was any hope had gained the ascent, and Lentulus, Æmilius, and their companions, yielded slowly; retreating backwards towards the path of safety. At last they turned at the word of command, to make one desperate rush, when they perceived a strong body of the foe, headed by a young chieftain whose sword was dripping with blood, rush across their very path. Hemmed in on all sides they felt that all hope was lost, and they could only die bravely and sell their lives dearly.

Suddenly in the midst of the fiercest moments of conflict when only two or three remained, amongst whom were yet Lentulus and Æmilius, the blow which threatened the life of the latter, was averted by a rapid sweep of another blade belonging to one of the hostile band, and Æmilius heard a voice say,—

"That man is mine."

He recognised it even at that moment, and beheld in the young chieftain who led the foe, the Persian whose life he had saved in the desert.

"Yield yourselves prisoners, and your lives shall be spared," cried the latter, in a loud voice.

But no Roman would drop his sword.

"Take them prisoners by force then," exclaimed the Persian, "but shed no more blood; we have sufficiently avenged our countrymen."

His orders were speedily accomplished, and Lentulus, Æmilius, and the other survivors, overpowered by numbers, were bound and led as prisoners to the Persian camp, through blazing streets, over charred bodies, or corpses so mangled as scarcely to appear human. Half stifled by smoke, they were conducted through the open gate, and at length reached the tents of their foes, which were almost empty, for they were all, alas, in the city, where Artabanus was directing his operations against the citadel in person.

It was again evening; the storm was over and the sun shone bright and clear ere he retired to rest, but from Nisibis a smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace.

The citadel alone remained, but it was in the hands of the Persians, its defenders having capitulated upon the sole promise that their lives should be spared, in the absence of their leaders, who had all fallen, save Lentulus.

Æmilius, who was seated with his fellow-captives in the interior of an apartment, in one of those towers, which the Persians had so hastily constructed, heard the door open, and beheld his Persian friend.

"Follow me," said the latter, in the quick hasty manner, indicating habitual command, which Æmilius had often noticed during their journey together. "Stay; I see you are yet a prisoner," he added, as he struck off the fetters which bound his friend; "I did not mean them to serve you thus, but your life is saved, and that is more than I dared expect; did I not tell you not to go to Nisibis? I see you yet have the ring."

Æmilius strove to thank him, but it was with a heavy heart.

"I am going to lead you to the tent of Sapor," added his preserver.

"Is he here in person?"

"Not yet; we shall not see the king, perhaps, till we reach Carrhæ, which he is now besieging; but you will see his son, and I have influence enough with him to gain you any favour you are likely to ask."

They entered the encampment and paused at the entrance to the tent over which the royal banner yet floated: the young Persian pushed the silken hangings aside which veiled the entrance, and entered.

Several officers in brilliant uniforms were present, who all bowed low as the chieftain appeared with his captive, and Æmilius instinctively penetrated the secret as he gazed upon an empty throne in their midst.

"Persians," said his guide, "behold my preserver. Æmilius, I am Chosroes, the son of Sapor."

CHAPTER IX.

VALERIAN.

THE Roman army under Valerian had at length advanced to the banks of the Euphrates. Its march across the desert had been a most calamitous one; water had failed the host in an unexampled manner, and that which they had found had sometimes appeared to possess poisonous qualities, so that numbers of men, horses, and camels left their bodies to taint the air at each oasis; and their course was marked by a line of corpses stretching across the sands, or by the flights of carrion birds who hovered above, eager for their loathsome prey, yet half fearing to touch it.

And now at length they reached Zeugma, on the banks of the long desired stream, reduced in numbers, and also wearied in mind and body,—a shadow of the mighty host which had left Antioch in all the pride and pomp of martial array.

They had somewhat feared that their passage across the stream would be disputed by the Persians, but no enemy was in sight, and the camp was formed on the banks, with that regularly and strict attention to detail which ever marked the discipline of the mightiest conquerors earth had seen.

As soon as the ground was chosen for the camp,

it was levelled, and every irregularity removed by the soldiers, to whom the use of spade and pickaxe was as familiar a part of warlike education as the use of sword and javelin. It included the space of a square whose side was a thousand yards, and was fortified immediately by a rampart twelve feet high, armed with strong pallisades, and by a ditch twelve feet deep and as many feet broad.

In the midst of the camp rose the prætorium, as the head quarters were called; cavalry, infantry, and what we may style artillery (consisting of the military engines belonging to each legion) occupied their respective positions, forming streets broad and straight, opening upon the prætorium as their centre, and terminating so as to leave a space of two hundred feet between the rampart and the tents.

Such was each night the first labour of the soldiers who had staggered over the sands of the desert beneath the burning sun of Syria, laden with their weapons, their kitchen furniture, their spades, and their provisions. Yet under ordinary circumstances such toil did not oppress the Roman soldier, and the legions of Cæsar had marched to victory under encumbrances which would sorely test the strength of a modern host. But at this conjuncture a heavy weight of care and anxiety oppressed the whole army, from its imperial leader to the humblest legionary: the untoward events of the journey, the numerous and strange deaths, the suspicions thereby aroused, formed a heavy burden.

Yet a feeling of relief came upon each soldier, as he beheld the refreshing waters of the river, whose very name signified the gladness it brought to the regions it laved.

Pure and sweet water had revived the bodies of

the weary travellers, and the merry song or joyful laugh again re-echoed.

In the tent of Valerian, around the hospitable board, sat the chief officers of the army, amongst whom Macrianus was conspicuous.

"We have reached the Euphrates, my friends, and fellow-soldiers," said the emperor, "and we trust happier days are in store for us. Our countrymen, indeed, need our help; Carrhæ and Nisibis are no more, but Edessa yet holds out valiantly against the foe."

"And deeply will we avenge the fallen brave," replied Macrianus, "so that Persian shall never dare in future to cross the Tigris."

"It must be so," said Valerian, "the Persians may not hope to resist the conquerors of those very Greeks before whom Darius and his craven hosts fled like sheep. Once in face of the foe, what Roman can fear? The uncertainty is over; and those invisible foes who have impeded our passage over the desert, will yield place to mortal enemies, whom our weapons may pierce."

"Yes," cried Victorinus, who had the command of the most renowned of the legions, "we shall soon have the pleasure of escorting Sapor to Rome, and when Valerian ascends the capitol to sacrifice the milk white steer, let Sapor, like Jugurtha, perish in the Tullianum."

This sentiment excited universal applause, for the Romans were never merciful to fallen foes.

"We bend our course," said Valerian, when the tumult had subsided, "towards Edessa; there the final struggle will take place; the distance is but sixty miles; three days will suffice to accomplish it."

"What force does the enemy possess?"

"Countless numbers, doubtless," said Valerian, "but lions are not accustomed to count the numbers of the herd of deer they assail."

Loud cheers greeted this warlike speech, and the guests separated with renewed confidence in Roman valour. If the Greeks under Alexander had conquered the hosts of Darius when the latter were ten times more numerous than they, what could not the conquerors of the Greeks hope to accomplish.

When all was quiet in the Roman camp, and the mighty host, save the sentinels, had yielded to the influence of sleep, a solitary individual issued from the prætorium, clad in a heavy military cloak, and made his way through the streets of the camp towards the river.

Here and there he was intercepted by the sentinels, to whom he gave the password, and continued his course, until he had passed through the opened gate, and gazed upon the stream as it flowed gently by, reflecting the light of the stars on its surface as it rippled onward.

Behind him was the sleeping host; before him, on the other side of the stream, the mountains near Edessa were dimly visible in the faint moonlight, for the moon had now arisen. Some distance above, a few low houses were grouped together on either shore, and a dark line connecting them shewed the position of the bridge of boats which had already been taken possession of by the Romans, for this was the chief route of caravans and travellers from Syria to Mesopotamia.

No opposition was offered of any kind, yet the Persians were very near.

The dark featured individual whom we have in-

troduced to our readers seemed under the influence of deep but suppressed emotion.

"Yes," he said, "it is all but accomplished, and vengeance, my cherished dream since boyhood, is about to be fulfilled. A father, once a prince of his people, murdered,—a mother dishonoured,—a whole people exterminated,—such is the injury, and the desert hills of Mesopotamia will witness the revenge. How long they are! Stay, there is the boat!"

The faint ripple of a boat stemming the water was heard, and at last it appeared in view. A solitary oarsman was within, who paused as he approached the shore, and uttered a few words in the Persian dialect.

Receiving the answer he sought, he bent to the oars, and the boat touched the beach; the other leapt in, and together they recrossed the stream in silence.

The opposite bank gained, the passenger ascended from the boat, and beheld a single individual standing beneath the shade of a tree; he advanced towards the stranger and bowed low without speaking.

It was a young man who awaited him, but one who was evidently of distinguished rank; in the back-ground, at some distance, a servant was seated upon a horse, holding the reins of another in his hands, from which the rider had dismounted.

"Macrianus, I believe," said the Persian, for such was the stranger.

"I am Macrianus, your highness; my work partially completed, I await your further instructions."

"They are brief," replied Chosroes, for it was he; "Nisibis and Carrhæ have both fallen, but Edessa

yet stands as a bait for the Roman; he must be persuaded to hasten to its relief."

"He has already so determined."

"Good; a few miles below Edessa a narrow valley opens into the mountains, barren, destitute of water and forage; the guides may easily lead him into it under the pretence of reaching Edessa from the south and taking the Persians who besiege it by surprise."

"On the third day," said Macrianus, "we shall reach the opening of the valley, and on the fourth morning penetrate it."

"Once within," replied Chosroes, "the work is ours, the reward yours, and ours."

"For myself," added the other, "I have but to stipulate that no mercy be shown to Valerian and his followers, and that my share in the work be concealed for the present; I have yet further designs upon Rome."

"All this shall be willingly granted, and you may claim any further reward you please when the work is over. On the evening of the third day we shall expect to see your watch fires beneath the hills, and on the fourth to welcome the Romans into the trap."

"They are anticipating the capture of King Sapor, and are already designing his share in the triumph of Valerian, which is death by strangulation in the Tullianum, where Rome has before now put to death many an unfortunate prince who has fallen into her grasp."

They laughed scornfully, and, after a few more words, in which they arranged the details of the coming catastrophe so far as was in their power, separated, Macrianus returning to the camp of the

men he had betrayed, Chosroes and his attendants galloping across the plains towards the distant mountains.

On the following morning, the Roman army crossed the Euphrates, slowly defiling over the bridge of boats, and entered the more fertile plains of Mesopotamia.

The mountains near Edessa were now for the first time clearly visible to them, and Valerian gazed intently upon their jagged outline.

"I have surely seen those mountains before," he exclaimed to one of his attendants, "yet I have never been in the east; it must have been in a dream. Is there not a defile in them, opening between precipices which approach each other, and then widening as it penetrates their recesses?"

"The guides describe such a defile, and say it leads to the southern approaches to Edessa."

"I trust our road does not lie through it then. I remember now the dream. I thought I stood in the valley, which was covered with the bones of the slain, and that Crassus stood by my side, (he perished near here,) and that he pointed to the ghastly remains. 'See,' he said, 'they outnumber those of *my* soldiers. Crassus has been eclipsed by Valerian.'"

The emperor shuddered, and the tale produced a marked impression on his attendants.

"Omens," observed Victorinus, "are for children; the best omen is to fight for one's country."

The third day had ended, and the camp was formed on the verge of the plain outside the defile,

which opened in front of them. On the morrow Valerian had decided to enter, in spite of his sad presentiments, which were not now shared by his companions, whose spirits had been marvellously raised by the superior accommodation of the country over which they had travelled since leaving the river; there had been no more suffering from want of food and water, although at intervals they had crossed sandy plains.

The outer rampart was erected, the ditch dry, the tents pitched, the guards set, and, after a banquet in the prætorium, the Roman leaders sought strength for the morrow's toil, in sleep,—to many the last sleep ere that of death.

But Valerian was observed by his confidential slaves to start uneasily from his couch after midnight and seek the open air.

"Come hither, Stephanos," he said to his favourite freedman; "do you ever dream?"

"Sometimes, my lord."

"And do you ever have the same dreams twice over?"

"I cannot recollect such an event."

"It has now occurred to me, and a fearful vision it has been. I thought I had entered that same defile, which opens so wild and lonely before us in the dim moonlight, and gazed upon the wrecks of military engines and warlike weapons, upon the bones of camels, horses, and men. A form was beside me, and I knew him as though I had met him in life; it was Crassus, who perished with his host in this neighbourhood, and with him this time was a third, and I knew Varus. 'Crassus,' said Varus (in my dream), 'which destroyed the goodliest number, you or I?' 'You,' replied he, 'but we are both eclipsed by Valerian.'"

"The gods avert the omen," replied Stephanos, shuddering.

"I feel very reluctant to enter the defile," said the emperor, "but see here comes Macrianus in his heavy cloak, where can he have been?"

"Watchful as ever, Macrianus?" said Valerian.

Macrianus started as he heard the voice of the emperor, but immediately replied,—

"I was but seeing to the vigilance of the sentinels in person; but I am surprised to see you, my lord, at this hour; surely you need sleep."

"I have been troubled by bad dreams, Macrianus; I have almost made up my mind not to enter that defile."

"In that case, my lord, we must retrace our steps almost to the Euphrates, and I will gladly obey, but we must give up the hope of relieving Edessa; I am told that it is all but too late now."

"What distance is it to Edessa, through the defile?"

"A very short one, and our route is unsuspected, so that we shall emerge suddenly upon the flanks of the enemy."

"It is too great an advantage to be thrown aside for an omen. I must conquer these fancies. Macrianus, we will continue our course."

"As your lordship pleases."

"I must try to get some more rest," said Valerian, and he sought his couch, and tossed restlessly thereon until the sun had risen and the trumpets had summoned the army from its slumbers.

It was noonday, and the Roman army was toiling along the valley, hoping each moment to

see Edessa, not knowing that they were actually travelling in a contrary direction, when suddenly they perceived a mighty dust arise in the distance; the legions at once halted, formed into order of battle, and awaited the foe.

From the dust the glitter of spears and swords appeared, and the Persian host in all its splendour, opposed the further progress of Rome.

The Romans felt that they were in a difficulty, the ground was unsuited for their evolutions; they paused for orders, Valerian was far behind, when the foe commenced throwing up a rampart, fixing materials, which they had brought for that purpose, and digging a trench.

The legate of the legion, which led the advance, immediately gave orders to charge, for there was no time to be lost, but so confined was the locality, so deadly the shower of darts and arrows from behind the partially raised breastwork, that it was in vain; Roman valour itself could not carry the position.

The whole army halted; Valerian galloped forward, gave orders for another attack which failed like the former, and then turned to look helplessly at the hills on either side; he beheld their precipitous summits crowded with men, preparing to roll down huge rocks upon his soldiers.

The only course was to retrace their steps; forming anew with Roman celerity, the army retreated, pursued by darts from behind; encumbered with the baggage; while huge rocks ever and anon came crashing amongst them, destroying whole companies who could not avoid them in their close array.

They had now arrived in sight of the entrance to the defile, when the rear guard, now become in

turn the advance, raised a bitter cry of despair; a rampart was already thrown up against them, bristling with soldiers.

They attacked it, and fought with the energy of despair, but all was in vain, the fortification was too strong to be carried.

They were indeed enclosed in a trap: the mountains on each side, the foes before and behind.

"My dream! my dream!" said the unhappy Valerian, "Crassus! Varus! your warnings were too true!"

But it was no time to yield to despair, the necessity for exertion was so great; putting himself at the head of his choicest troops, he made one mighty effort to carry the breastwork which the Persians had raised at the entrance to the defile.

It was a fearful hand to hand struggle, but behind their fortifications the foe had the advantage of position as well as of numbers, and the Romans fell beneath their darts, and beneath falling rocks in such crowds, that the heights of the fallen bodies soon equalled the height of the rampart, yet all their desperate efforts failed.

Bitter groans, the cries of helpless wretches, crushed by the falling masses; the shrieks of wounded horses; the fierce and joyful cries of the victors; such were the sounds which continued until the evening came.

Night closed upon the scene, and the Romans were huddled together with but little hope. Yet they had made a feeble attempt to carry out their usual arrangements: it was sad to see the prætorium pitched as usual in the most open space available, and to behold the semblance of imperial dignity yet maintained.

Valerian was at the table reclining on the couch as usual, around him were gathered his chief officers; dejection sat on every brow.

"Fellow-soldiers," said he, "we can at least die bravely; it is all that is left us."

"Why die at all?" said Macrianus, "the Persians will yield passage, if Sapor is asked for mercy."

The Romans looked sternly at Macrianus.

"Mercy," said they.

"Their demand," continued he, "is that we retire beyond the Euphrates; we must concede it, and we need but retire like the panther who draws back to make a yet longer leap."

"Will Sapor be so deceived, will he grant such terms?"

"Send at least an embassy to offer them."

"It shall be done, not for my own sake, but for that of my children around me," replied the emperor.

At day-break the Persian trumpets blew their shrill challenge, and those of the Romans answered sadly. An embassy was sent to beseech an audience of Sapor.

They were permitted to enter within the lines of the foe, to mark their numbers and discipline; their stores of provisions; their array of military engines and weapons; and then were told that Sapor would only treat with Valerian in person.

Sorrowfully they brought their tidings back; it seemed almost treason to name such conditions to their divinity, the emperor.

He heard, and looked at Macrianus.

"Sire," said Macrianus, "Sapor is just, he will not abuse your position, if he gives you a safe conduct he will respect it."

"No! no!" said Victorinus.

"No! no!" said the other generals, fiercely, "we will not trust our emperor to the hands of these Persians."

"Macrianus, you are not a Roman," said Victorinus, "or you would not dare to hint at such treason; you do not know that one of the leaders under Varus was slain by his companions for proposing a lighter dishonour; they assembled a court and condemned him to death as a coward and traitor."

"Stay and perish then," replied Macrianus.

"Hold," said Valerian, "no more of this. It is I who have led you all into this danger; it is meet I should suffer for it."

"We will not permit it, lord, we ask but permission to make one more charge."

"I give it," said Valerian, "and if it fails I will offer myself as the victim in your stead; no more words, my resolution is taken."

Once more the Romans charged the rampart with heroic bravery and self-devotion; but, alas, it had been strengthened during the night, and the numbers of the foe had been augmented: they assaulted it in vain.

And now food threatened to fail, and water grew scarce, sorely as it was needed to refresh the fainting soldiers after their heroic exertions. More pitiful yet was it to hear the groans of the wounded, and to be able to make no response to the plaintive cries for "water, water," which resounded on all sides.

Attended by his guard of honour, proud and gallant in his demeanour to the last, Valerian passed the bulwark to seek mercy from Sapor; the soldiers wept for very shame as he went by.

In front of his glittering tent, with the emblems

of Persian sovereignty displayed, sat the emperor. As Valerian drew near he neither rose nor saluted him; the fallen Cæsar stood before his throne.

"Valerian, the Emperor of Rome and ruler of the west, has come to seek terms of peace from Sapor," said the interpreter.

"Ask him whether the milk-white steer awaits him on the Capitoline hill, and whether the Tullianum is ready for Sapor."

"He seeks peace; nay, mercy."

"Mercy," said the Persian, "Mercy; what does Rome mean by the word? Yes, such mercy as Hannibal, Jugurtha, and thousands of unhappy kings have found from her ruthless hand. The tables are now turned. He has come to seek the empire of the east, he shall be a footstool to its true sovereign, and in the degradation of a Cæsar, Persian boys shall learn to despise Rome."

"Valerian comes here trusting to the safe conduct."

"Who has given him a safe conduct? He comes trusting simply to our mercy. Artabanus, come here; like me thou hast cause to hate Rome, gaze upon the mighty emperor. Ho! guards, seize him, and his, and bind them with the heaviest fetters."

Two individuals gazed upon this scene with feelings of intense delight, the one was Artabanus, the other Macrianus.

The fallen emperor marked how the latter was alone exempted from the fate which befel the rest of his suite.

"Macrianus," he said, "can it be? Canst thou have betrayed me?"

"I have," was the cold reply.

It was the bitterest pang of all.

"Macrianus," said Valerian, "the gods will

avenge me. I ever trusted thee and thou hast lured me to my doom."

"I have but avenged a murdered father, a dishonoured mother, and a ruined country," was the reply.

"Spare then my subjects, my children; let thy revenge fall upon me, upon *me* alone!"

The last words fell faintly upon the ears of Macrianus, as the guards led the fallen monarch away.

And now from all sides the Persians assaulted the remnant of the Roman host. They had only delayed until they could secure Valerian alive, according to the express desire of Sapor. Attacked on each side, the Romans perished; perished like men; their corpses strewed the valley, and a few only survived to be the slaves of the Persian conqueror.

When all was over and nightfall had settled upon the scene, Artabanus sought the tent of his royal master.

He returned from the presence with exultation speaking in each line of his countenance.

"At last," he said, "at last the vision is about to be fulfilled."

The morning sun arose, and gilded the spears of fifty thousand horseman, as they slowly debouched from the defile and took the track across the plain for the Euphrates and the west. At their head rode their great leader, whose excitement and joy had communicated itself to all the host.

"Spare not the spur," he cried, "Antioch and the regions of the west are open to us: we will carry the tidings of the defeat of Valerian."

At the distance of a few miles only from this spot, two travellers, with their attendants, mounted

upon good horses, gazed upon the Persians from the summit of a mountain pass which descended to the plain.

"Do you behold them, Lentulus?" said the younger, "there must be nearly fifty thousand; what can it mean? Valerian is defeated and they travel westward; they seek Antioch, they can have no other destination."

The elder gazer started, and the colour forsook his face, as the idea presented itself.

"Hasten, hasten!" he said, "let us descend, at once, immediately! we may save the unhappy city, —keep to the northward; we may reach Zeugma first, and cross the desert before them; tens of thousands of lives hang upon our speed!"

"My father, my mother, my sister!"

"Forward, forward."

It was indeed Lentulus and his young friend, Æmilius, released at last from honourable captivity by order of Chosroes, who supposed when he sent the order that there was no further occasion for secresy as to the Persian movements, for Valerian was entrapped, and the ultimate movements were not yet designed.

But the ex-governor and our hero had learned the whole truth about Valerian, and too truly guessed the destination of the fifty thousand.

Onward they sped with their few attendants, who were of the survivors of the fall of Nisibis; life, and more than life, depended upon their speed.

CHAPTER X.

HOME AGAIN.

IT was a wild stormy night, and the winds which had swept the Mediterranean from west to east were spending their fury upon Antioch and its vicinity. Deluges of rain descended, and then for awhile the clouds were swept away before the angry gusts, and the moon, wading through the light fleecy particles which yet floated in her path, cast a ghastly light upon the surrounding scenery, now rivalling the light of day in its cold whiteness, now feebly piercing the veil of mist, until once more black masses hid her form and all was dark and gloomy, while the pitiless hail rattled on the pavement, or shattered the windows of palace and mansion.

Gaze upon the city, as the clouds clear away and the moon again emerges; even in the strife of the elements how lovely she is! how beautiful the surrounding scenery! how matchless her temples!

And beneath her ten thousand roofs her people sleep in shelter from the storm. Alas, a fiercer storm is about to burst over them, and they know it not, and many a heart shall be cold to-morrow which now beats with the pulses of love or passion, or sleeps in the calm assurance of safety.

Surely Rome is yet Rome; what need then of anxiety.

But there is one who walks out on the terraces of the legatine palace, during the pauses between the gusts of wind and rain; anxiety and impatience are on his face; he awaits a messenger perhaps; or have ill dreams troubled his rest, and driven him forth? he gazes upon the waters of the Orontes as they flow calmly by: what is he thinking of? does he know that they will soon be tinged with blood? he beholds the moonlight quiver on temple and palace, on turret and pinnacle; does he know that a fiercer glare shall illuminate them on the morrow?

The souls under the Altar are yet crying, "How long, O Lord, how long?" the blood of the just cries for vengeance from the ground. Are there yet *ten* in Antioch to stay the uplifted rod?

Yes; there are ten and more than ten, but though in the city, they are not of it.

Look at the roof of the prison; it gleams now in the moonbeams which have just pierced a rift in the clouds: beneath that roof ten saints of God await the hour of martyrdom.

Look at the amphitheatre, now silent and deserted; within a few hours the locarii will besiege its entrances; there are the beasts who await their prey. And in the school of the lanista hard by, sleep the men of blood—the gladiators—who will make sport for the people on the morrow, at the expense of their lives. To-night there are those in this city who even in their dreams anticipate the bloody enjoyment of the morrow.

Sleep on, sleep on, master and slave, martyr and judge, gladiator and legatus; there shall be grand

games to-morrow, and the victims shall not be spared.

The storm which beat so wildly over the city did not spare the villa of Cornelius, so well known to our readers; its force was even more intense, owing to the exposed situation of the habitation, and the hail destroyed the windows, rattled amongst the statues, and upon the glazed pavement of the peristylium, while the wind roared around the buildings, or seemed to moan piteously for entrance. It was scarcely possible to hear one's own voice at certain periods of the storm; and at intervals the fall of some giant tree in the gardens, or adjacent forest, seemed to shake the ground.

Cornelius, his wife, and daughter were reclining upon couches in the smaller dining hall, the concluding course of the cœna, or evening meal, was before them, almost untasted; the curtains were drawn so as to exclude the storm, and to deaden its uproar; they said little save when some louder burst of fury diversified the monotonous sound of wind and rain.

Cornelius still bore the same noble expression of features which characterized him at his first introduction to our readers, yet age had left its mark upon him, his scanty locks were grey, the furrows in his brow and cheeks had deepened, and there was an expression of anxiety and unrest observable upon his face.

The loss of his son had tried him deeply; he had wandered about his gardens and in the woods for months afterwards, as if he needed solitude that

he might indulge unseen in the luxury of grief, —grief which he sternly repressed in the presence of others.

It was only a month after the martyrdom of Eteocles that he ascertained that his son had sailed from Seleucia for Rome in a vessel which perished in a fearful storm, within two days of her leaving the port; her figure-head was cast on the shore to the north of the Orontes, enquiries were instituted concerning her passengers, and the sad news of the supposed fate of their son was in this manner conveyed to the afflicted parents.

They knew not that a few passengers escaped in an open boat, and were received on board another vessel bound for Alexandria, whence in time they reached Rome, their original destination.

From that day Cornelius and Æmilia strove to forget their loss, but in vain; the image of their boy was ever before them. The more they refrained from the mention of his name, the more memory recalled every lineament of his countenance, every tone of his voice, to the thoughts of the heart. To his sister it was a crushing blow, for she and Æmilius had been inseparable companions and had loved each other most dearly. She wandered in every path he had once trodden with her, remembered every flower he had admired; often she mused alone in the avenue of plane trees, and the thought forced itself upon her, "What was the true nature of that absorbing Faith for which he had sacrificed home, and life itself," as she supposed.

The reader will not be surprised to learn that after the martyrdom of Eteocles the whole family shunned the sports of the amphitheatre, and even restrained their household slaves from the ac-

customed gratifications, so dear to slave and freeman alike in that unhappy period.

But one more observation, and we shall resume the thread of our narrative; in the closing years of life, when all his old expectations of future happiness seemed to fail him, Cornelius felt most deeply the unsatisfying and delusive nature of his ancestral faith, and had even dared to peruse the well-known Apology for the Christians put forth by S. Justin in the previous century; this had but recently occurred and had utterly unsettled his former belief, while it led him to seek further insight into the Mysterious Creed which had robbed him of his son.

On the other hand he perused the answers which the Pagan philosophers had not failed to put forth, in order to stem the tide of progress of that school of Christian philosophy, which in spite of deadly persecution, found intellectual defenders in Antioch, even amongst those who, holding the theory without the practice, did not scruple to comply with the imperial edict, while they perused with pleasure, the works of Clement of Alexandria, or his successor, Origen, and disputed over them for the love of disputation.

But the battle of Christianity had to be fought in the arena, not in the schools of the philosophers.

In the midst of the storm, just after a furious gust had elicited a common exclamation from the little party, a slave entered and informed Cornelius that a traveller, drenched to the skin, sought refuge from the inclemency of the weather; one whose dress and manner bespoke the Roman.

"Admit him instantly," said Cornelius, "offer him dry garments and the bath, and then bring him here."

A short time passed and the stranger appeared. Cornelius rose to receive him, a look of bewildered surprise passed over his features, he gazed as if he refused to believe his own eyes; but they persisted in telling him that his old friend and fellow soldier Lentulus stood before him.

"You here? you Lentulus? from what cloud have you dropped? but you are indeed welcome,—has Valerian so soon subdued his foes? no; don't tell us yet, your news will keep, it must be good news; sit down, you must need refreshment very much; how did you come?"

The warmth of his reception by the whole party appeared to gratify Lentulus deeply; it was some minutes ere he replied in answer to renewed inquiries.

"I am here, indeed, in safety, to my own surprise; I thought at one time that I should never see Antioch again."

"And Valerian was, I infer, just in time to save you."

"Alas! no."

"How, then, did you escape? has Nisibis fallen?"

"It has."

"Then the emperor has delivered you from captivity?"

"No; I owe my deliverance to the bravery and self-devotion of a young Roman who came to Nisibis from Rome just before the siege, and fought by my side to the last."

"But how did he save you?"

"Not merely by warding off strokes aimed at my life in the battle; he had been fortunate enough to establish a claim upon the generosity of Sapor by saving the life of his son in the desert, in consequence of which he was offered every temptation to forsake the cause of his country and to embrace that of Persia, but he was firm in his allegiance, and simply implored liberty for himself and his friend."

"And the claim was allowed to be sufficient for himself and you?"

"It was."

"What was his name?"

"He was the son of an old friend of mine, and I discovered him by his likeness to his father, of whom he was not unworthy, and that is saying a great deal."

"How strange."

"Stranger still, his father did not even know that he was alive, but believed him numbered with the dead."

Cornelius glanced at his wife and daughter; they listened with painful anxiety.

"How did that happen?" said the father with faltering voice.

"He had been banished from his home, and they believed he had been lost at sea."

"Lentulus, you are not trifling with me, you were here one sad night nearly ten years ago, you know our deep affliction. Cornelia, Cornelia, restrain your emotion. Lentulus your story is too like ours—you know a mother's feelings."

"Cornelius, my old friend—my much valued friend and fellow soldier—I am not trifling with you; indeed I am not."

"What does this means?"

"I fear I am an old fool as well as an old soldier, I cannot manage matters—see your wife is fainting, or something like it. Cornelia, my dear young lady, take care of your mother, only a minute, I will not keep your father long. Cornelius, come with me; let me talk to you here, here in the peristylium, if these tiresome winds will let us hear each others voices."

"Lentulus, I ask once more, what does this mean? you know my poor boy is dead or I should really have thought——"

"Cornelius, my preserver is without, may I bring him in?"

The father sank down on a bench which was wet with the rain which had beaten in, but he was unconscious of it, he buried his face in his hands, and his manly frame shook with excitement which he could no longer subdue.

Lentulus went through the atrium, to the outer door, and bid the porter open; the astonished slave obeyed; he strode out into the night.

Leaning against a marble pillar, insensible to rain or wind, stood Æmilius; just as Lentulus appeared, the fitful gleams of the moon, as the clouds for a moment left her face, fell brightly upon him, and illumined his countenance,—it was pale as that of a corpse.

"Æmilius, my dear boy, come in, your father awaits you."

"Oh, I cannot come, if he should curse me it would kill me."

"He will not; he loves you as much as ever; come in."

The heart of Æmilius beat wildly with emotion

as Lentulus led him within his own home, the home of his boyhood.

They passed through the atrium, through the passage leading to the peristylium.

"Cornelius," said Lentulus.

The father rose, beheld his long-lost boy, and fell on his neck; the long-closed fountains yielded, and the tears gushed forth. "My boy, my own boy," was all he could say; then he held his son at arm's length; he gazed upon his features; he passed his hand over them, as if he would assure himself by touch as well as by sight; as if he could not trust his eyes; "yes; it is Æmilius—Æmilius; it is no dream—no dream."

But we cannot pursue this scene or describe the yet more touching moment when his mother embraced her boy,—such scenes exceed the power of words.

An hour had passed, and emotion had yielded to deep quiet joy, the more obvious questions had been put and answered; Æmilius sat at his father's board; the slaves with tearful eyes overwhelmed him with attentions, when Lentulus spoke.

"Cornelius," he said solemnly, "brief is the space we can now give, even to the present happiness, to the hallowing affections of home. I, your old friend, must break in upon your dream, for it is like a dream to you, I am sure."

"It is, indeed; but what can disturb us now that we have Æmilius home again?"

"A Roman lives for his country."

"And is that country in danger?"

"It is, indeed; Valerian has been defeated."

"Is it possible? can it be?"

"He is, indeed, utterly defeated, and his forces are all slain, or prisoners to Sapor."

"Lentulus, you surely jest?"

"Not I; it is alas, too true; and at this moment fifty thousand Persians are crossing the desert, following on our track to burn and destroy; not a moment must be lost, if we would save Antioch."

A loud knocking was heard at the outer door. All started, the sound seemed so ominous.

The storm was yet raging in all its fury; the loud knocking was again repeated.

The favourite freedman of Cornelius appeared looking greatly alarmed.

"There is the centurion, Varro, at the door," he exclaimed, "with his whole company, and they have surrounded the house."

"What can this insolence mean?" said Cornelius, "admit the fellow; let him tell us what he wants. I have yet, I trust, sufficient influence to punish such an intrusion upon my domestic privacy."

Varro did not await the return of the freedman, but, accompanied by two or three powerful men, strode towards the tablinum, and, pushing aside the curtains, stood in the opening. He was one of the most unscrupulous instruments Eucrates possessed, a half-breed, of Roman and Greek parents, who possessed all the vices of the two races, without any of their virtues, save brute courage.

"I have come here, Cornelius, to arrest traitors," he cried, "your guests are Persian spies, and I possess the warrant of the legatus for their arrest; one of them is also a Nazarene."

"How fellow" cried Lentulus, "do you dare accuse me of being a spy? your head shall answer for this!"

"I can keep my own head," replied Varro, "it

will be well for you if you can keep yours,—resist the law at your peril."

"There must be some mistake," said Cornelius, "Eucrates surely could not dare—Varro, this is my old friend Lentulus, the governor of Nisibis."

"He may be the Emperor of Rome as well, but he has to come with me. Advance, soldiers, and attach the persons of the prisoners."

"Let no resistance be offered," said Lentulus, "we will go with them,—it must be all made clear at Antioch. Come Æmilius!"

The dismay of Æmilius was very great; he knew Eucrates better than Lentulus, and suspected him of treachery towards Rome; he feared that his absence might be the destruction of his home and father's household; only just restored, it was painful in the extreme degree to be forcibly removed, never, perhaps, to behold the loved faces again,—to fall into the hands of his wicked cousin, who, he knew, could condemn him as a Christian, if no other excuse presented itself.

"Varro," he said, "we have but just arrived; we have hastened over the desert to save Antioch. The Persians are near."

Varro listened with an incredulous smile, and snapped his fingers contemptuously, as he replied:

"You may tell that to the legatus."

The soldiers departed leading their prisoners with them; Cornelius would have followed, but they absolutely forbade his doing so, and left a guard to prevent any member of the household from leaving home, so that they were all virtually prisoners.

No explanation was given of this strange conduct, and Cornelius complained in vain; nothing

was left but to console the afflicted Æmilia and Cornelia, thus a second time bereaved of son and brother.

Eucrates yet paced the terraces of the palace, awaiting the arrival of his prisoners.

"Why do they delay," he said, "surely Varro cannot have miscarried?"

While he strove with difficulty to restrain his impatience, he heard the tramp of the soldiers as they approached the palace, and repaired to the atrium, in order to receive them.

Milo entered.

"Have you succeeded?" enquired the legatus.

"We have; Varro is now conducting them both to the prætorium."

"It is well; I will go there at once."

And wrapping himself up in a military cloak, accompanied by Milo, with whom he conversed in a low tone of voice, he crossed the bridge, and in a few minutes reached the prætorium, took his place on the judgment seat, and ordered the guard to bring in the prisoners.

Lentulus and Æmilius were led before him, and as he met their glances, he could hardly help lowering his eyes.

Behind them stood the brutal Varro and his soldiers, many of whom held torches. They were all, without exception, ruffians, selected for their bad qualities; and were, body and soul, the property of Eucrates.

"Your names?" said the legatus.

"Lentulus, late governor of Nisibis, a Roman citizen; why am I arrested?"

"You will soon find out; if for no other reason, because you have given a false name; I have authority for stating that Lentulus was killed in the siege of Nisibis."

"There is one here who knows me," said the accused, "Milo, your own messenger, who brought me your despatches.

"Milo," said Eucrates, "do you know this person?"

"I never set eyes on him before," replied the unblushing Milo.

"Liar!" replied Lentulus,—you do not know my fellow-traveller, I suppose?"

"Yes, I do; he is"——

"Stay," said Eucrates, "we must observe the ordinary forms of justice,—your name and station, prisoner?"

"Æmilius, the son of Cornelius," and the speaker fixed an indignant and fearless gaze upon his cousin, before which in spite of his audacity he quivered.

"A Christian, and a Persian spy?"

"A Christian, but no spy,—we have come to save Antioch."

"Yes," said Lentulus, burying his own indignation in his zeal for his country, "Valerian has been defeated,—the Persians are crossing the desert; they are just behind us; they will be here in a few hours;—do not lose time; if my words do not prove true before this time to-morrow, then doom me to death."

"These are indeed huge lies," replied Eucrates; "Milo, who stands by your side, has but just brought me intelligence that Valerian has gained a complete victory;—Sapor is slain, and the

Persians have recrossed the Tigris in utter confusion."

Lentulus could hardly believe his ears, or contain his wrath.

"Then the blood of the miserable inhabitants be on your head, Eucrates; you are a traitor, and in the pay of Persia!"

"No doubt you know well what kind of pay that is, from personal experience; but it is time to end this. Hear your sentence; but first, that all around may be satisfied with its justice,—Milo, give your testimony."

"First, concerning the younger prisoner," replied the Greek, "I have myself seen him, when I was prisoner in the Persian camp, in conference with Artabanus, by whom he was sent into the city of Nisibis that he might betray it, and its unfortunate governor, Lentulus, who perished in its destruction. I ask the prisoner to answer this question: was he not released without any ransom by Artabanus, because he bore on his finger a signet given by the son of Sapor?"

"Yes; but"——

"We need no 'buts,'" said Eucrates, "this is sufficient. Justice must be done; I deeply regret that I am unable to spare the criminal, who is, alas! my near kinsman."

"I can bear witness for him," interrupted Lentulus, "you must hear me."

"What! hear one spy bear witness in favour o another; you will need all your efforts to preserve your own life. All we know of you is that you are arrested in the company of a spy."

"Not all," said Milo, "for I begin to think that I myself have beheld the elder prisoner in conference with Artabanus and Sapor."

"Liar!" exclaimed the indignant Lentulus, "you will accuse the unhappy Valerian next."

"Unhappy, indeed, to have such traitors amongst his subjects; but I can delay no longer; you have just arrived in time; to-morrow morning the great games are celebrated in the amphitheatre, and you will both be present, but not as spectators—as food for the beasts. Guards, remove them to their dungeons for the night; let us see whether they can sleep to-night and die to-morrow."

"I appeal to you, guards," said Lentulus, "if there is a Roman amongst you. You are not merely destroying me, but Antioch; at least, see to the gates,—send out horsemen to bring tidings"——

"Remove him; leave the younger prisoner behind one moment; Artemon, stay as guard."

"Æmilius," said the legatus slowly, "we shall meet once more, and only once more. I will speak in Latin, which your guard cannot understand. I know you speak the truth, that the Persians are near, but they are my friends, and to-morrow places your sister, who has rejected my love,—your father, who has disinherited me,—alike in my power; your inheritance will be mine, little as I shall need it, and Rome, with all its hateful associations, will be driven from Asia,—leaving the bodies of her soldiers and citizens a prey to the birds and beasts,—all this I know, and that you have spoken truly, but they will not believe you. You cannot save Antioch; it is to prevent your doing so that I have arrested you, and your death will but precede the total destruction of all that Rome holds within her walls, and of the cowards who have submitted to her rule."

"Eucrates," replied Æmilius, "you may condemn me to die; I am your prisoner, but I would not change places with you for all the wealth of the world. Traitor and coward, your name will become an execration to all generations, and there is a day of reckoning you cannot escape, little as you know it."

Eucrates only replied by a sneer, and the guards removed his victim.

How bitter were his thoughts in the darkness of his prison, we need not describe. He was not about to perish like Eteocles, simply for his Faith, but a victim to the hatred of his cousin, and in his fate were involved the fortunes of all those who were dear to him. Yet, even in that darkness,—darkness physical and mental,—he was not utterly forsaken of God. He prayed, and his prayer was not unheard.

Eucrates returned to his palace through the storm which was now abating. His wishes all seemed gratified,—revenge, avarice, every evil passion was aroused within him, awaiting speedy repletion. He feared no evil, and felt no pity, although he knew that the destroyers of his native city were near: Milo had been his informant, for that worthy had witnessed the defeat of Valerian, and had been despatched across the desert by Artabanus so soon as the victims were hopelessly involved in the toils.

It was he who had discovered the arrival of Lentulus and Æmilius, who had travelled so rapidly as to overtake him; he had recognized them as they approached, himself unseen, and the reader knows the result.

Passing the dwellings where husband and wife,

mother and child, slept in peace,—oh! how treacherous a peace,—Eucrates reached his palace, and soon laid himself down to sleep in the solitude of his luxurious chamber.

Slowly the night passed away;—slowly to the afflicted household of Cornelius,—slowly to Lentulus and Æmilius in the inner prison: the stillness of death reigned over the city, only broken by the cry of the night watch, giving the assurance that peace and tranquility yet reigned.

Stand once more upon the great road to the east, near the precipice described before, and listen. The wind sighs amongst the branches of the trees, but it is dying away, and the moon shines brightly, for the clouds are gone.

What sound is that like the waves of the sea, as they break on the pebbly beach?—is it the footfall of a mighty host? What murmur is that which arises from the east, and draws nearer each minute?

To-morrow will give the answer.

CHAPTER XI.

RETRIBUTION.

THE dawn appeared, and the inhabitants of Antioch rose from their slumbers; a day of pleasure and excitement was, as they supposed, before them; and every heart beat high with expectation.

The sun rose and gilded the summit of the amphitheatre; gradually its beams pierced the dispersing gloom and shone upon the struggling multitude who crowded around the entrances of the galleries; the doors were opened, and the living tide surged into the tiers of seats which rose up one above another, until the whole building, from its basement to its highest circle, was flooded with human life. It was the third hour when the young legatus took his seat, and the games commenced.

It is not our purpose to describe again the scenes of bloodshed and strife which followed, it is the third time that our readers have been introduced to the amphitheatre, and those who desire details may refer to the first chapter; there was little change or variety upon the present occasion.

There was a rumour amongst the crowd that

some prisoners of importance had been taken the night before, who were supposed to be spies sent by Sapor, and who had consequently been doomed to the beasts, and further it was said that they were to furnish by their punishment the most exciting act of the games.

As before, the populace became maddened with the sight of blood; as before, they gave signal by the depression of their thumbs for victors to bury their weapons in the bodies of their foes; the woe of the few was again the luxury of the many, and they knew not that the cup of their iniquities was now filling to the last drop.

It was the sixth hour: the bodies of the slain had been removed; the arena re-sprinkled for the last struggle, when the legatus gave the signal for the entrance of those doomed to the beasts. The martyrs appeared amidst shouts of "Christianos ad leones," from the lips of thousands of excited and furious spectators, who had but one common purpose,—hatred to the Crucified, and His followers, whose pure and holy lives were a constant rebuke to themselves. The heathen priests who served the shrine of Daphne, or ministered in the temples of Antioch, encouraged their deluded votaries, and execrations, hootings, and yellings, made the buildings of the city re-echo, as the waves of sound surged against their massive walls, or penetrated the deserted streets.

The city was nearly empty, even the guards at the citadels had been withdrawn, the gates were unwatched, all were in the amphitheatre who could crowd within its walls.

Silence fell upon the pitiless multitude, as the beasts of the desert appeared, and their fierce

hatred almost yielded to admiration as they gazed upon the calm faces of the victims. Yet they gazed with fierce delight upon the deadly rush,—the lacerated and mangled bodies of their fellow-citizens.

It was over,—the souls of the righteous were in the hand of God where no torment could touch them more,—the cup of Antioch's iniquity was full, and the hand of the destroying angel outstretched in wrath; but her people knew it not, nor yet beheld the flaming sword raised against them.

The exposure of Christians or criminals to the beasts was generally the last act of the games, but as the people were about to disperse, the voice of the herald interrupted them.

"Citizens of Antioch, retain your seats, an act of justice has as yet to be performed; a Persian spy is about to pay the penalty of his treason to his country, for he is a subject of Rome."

The beasts were at last driven in, the fragments removed, the arena resprinkled, the refreshing showers from the concealed conduits sprinkled the people with fragrant dew, and, thus refreshed, and relieved from the excessive heat of the day, they recomposed themselves for the final scene.

The officers led Æmilius on the arena.

It was the studied cruelty of Eucrates which thus reserved him to the last. He had not been exposed with the other Christians, that he might lose the glory of dying for Christ, and perish upon a political charge.

No sooner did the destined victim gain the centre of the arena, than, turning himself to the spectators, and stretching forth his hand to obtain a hearing, he cried aloud, in firm deliberate tones which claimed attention, and obtained it, in spite of the legatus.

"Men of Antioch, the Persians are approaching your gates, your legatus has betrayed you; I, myself, have seen the foe, and tell you that they are near; I am unjustly condemned lest I should save you; I am Æmilius, the son of Cornelius; my companion, Lentulus, the late governor of Nisibis, is a captive within the citadel."

There was a moment's breathless silence, the words of the victim would have probably passed wholly unheeded, but nearly all present recognised the speaker's likeness to Cornelius. Murmurs began to arise, and there was a movement amongst the crowd, when Eucrates cried or rather shouted,—

"Let loose the tiger; the speaker is a Persian spy and liar; we have information that Valerian has utterly destroyed Sapor; the criminal seeks to save himself by a lie."

Æmilius had fulfilled his duty to himself and his country; he said no more, but calmly resigned himself to his fate, and committed his soul to God.

But his words had not fallen to the ground unheeded.

There was a moment of suspense, and the door of the den which contained the tiger was opened; the monster, sleek and active as a cat, bounded forth. Not immediately seeing the victim, it crouched to the ground, and rubbed its face with its paws. Every movement of its flexible elastic body spoke of enormous activity and strength. At last it saw the prisoner and began to draw its body nearer and nearer, gathering itself up for the final spring.

At that moment a voice from the crowd exclaimed,—

"Son of Cornelius, defend thyself."

And a sword was thrown towards him with such force and dexterity that it fell almost at his feet. He seized it instantly, dropped on one knee, presented the point towards the tiger, steadying himself for the onset. It was but a moment; the ferocious brute came upon him with fearful violence, received the point of the sword in its breast, and beast and victim were seen the next instant rolling over together upon the sand.

The excitement of the people became intense, many rose and cheered Æmilius. Eucrates started from his seat, deadly pale, and gazed upon the conflict.

It was not of long duration; the tiger had received its death-wound in the onset; its subsequent movements had but been owing to its tenacity of life, and Æmilius disengaged himself from its deadly grasp, rising faint and bleeding, but yet victorious, while the tiger, the sword still protruding from its chest, whence Æmilius had failed to withdraw it, rolled over and over, bit the sand and died.

There was a general shout of applause which died as soon as it had begun, checked by an unexpected spectacle.

The doors of the arena were opened: a man entered, his garments torn, his hair dishevelled, the pallid hue of death upon his countenance.

In words which every individual present heard he cried aloud.

"The Persians! The Persians are in Antioch! Save yourselves; your wives; your children; the city is on fire!"

There was a moment's pause, the colour forsook every face, men gazed helplessly upon their neighbours, then the crowd poured forth, trampling the

fallen under foot; screams and groans were alike unheeded; each thought only of himself; the exterior of the amphitheatre was gained by the survivors, only to behold a tide of flames and smoke rolling along from the western part of the city, and to hear the blasts of the Persian trumpets accompanied by shrieks, groans, and all the awful cries which arise from a city stormed by the foe.

While they yet paused in indecision, the trampling of horses shook the earth, and a body of Persian cavalry, armed with spears, charged into the midst of the defenceless mass.

And now they who had so lately gazed upon the agonies of others, shared them in turn; now like sheep, defenceless before wolves, they were pierced by the Persian lance, or mowed down beneath the scimitars like grass before the scythe of the mower; all fell alike, men, women, and children; no mercy was shown, and the blood streamed down the gutters to defile the waters of the Orontes.

Æmilius yet stood in the arena, almost exhausted by his late deadly struggle; he heard the uproar, and guessed its meaning too well, yet hardly knew what step to take.

His doubts were soon solved; the tramp of feet approached, and he saw a body of Persians; their features and garments disfigured by dust and blood, but their leader was Chosroes.

"You are saved once more, Æmilius," he said, "we were told you were here; you must come with us; you shall have a troop of horse to take you home and protect your friends, whom the strife cannot yet have reached. But you are bleeding; did they set this tiger upon you? did you kill him?

was that your sword?" and Chosroes gazed upon Æmilius with warm admiration.

"Chosroes, I pray and entreat you, spare my unhappy countrymen; spare Lentulus."

"They deserve it, do they not? especially at *your* intercession; it is useless, however, I can only spare *you* and *yours*; follow me, we have no time to lose: the very heavens seem on fire. Lentulus is in the citadel, safe."

They issued from the amphitheatre; Æmilius groaned aloud as he gazed upon the heaps of slain: husband and wife; mother and child; some embracing the forms of their beloved ones, as if they had died in the effort to shield them; some yet writhing in agony and pain. Beyond them each street of the mighty city cast up volumes of smoke and flame, temple and palace were alike wrapped in the devouring element; but by the lurid light the massacre was still continuing.

The citadel was reached, how Æmilius hardly knew; it was in the hands of the Persians; Lentulus was there safe, and awaited his friend, whom he clasped in a warm embrace; neither spoke.

"We could not have saved you," said Chosroes, "had we not possessed a friend in the city, who came to meet us, and from whom we learned all before we actually came in sight of its gates; we were hardly in time as it was. Now you must get home, and take care of your friends; I have work to do here."

A few Persian horsemen stood near, with spare horses for Æmilius and Lentulus. They avoided the burning streets as much as possible, crossed the Orontes, red with the light of the conflagration, and yet redder as it flowed mingled with blood; and

made their way at full gallop towards the villa of Cornelius.

Once, and once only, they gazed back. It was a fearful evening; the smoke of Antioch ascended like the smoke of a furnace; the very heavens seemed to have caught fire as they reflected in changing hues the flames beneath; the guilty shrine of Daphne far beyond sent forth its streams of fire; every suburb and isolated villa, save one, seemed to have been given to the devouring element. The fugitives could not bear to look again.

The silence of that night, the suspense in which all were placed, was intolerable. Cornelius but clasped his beloved boy in his arms as he received him, and could say nothing; the hurts Æmilius had received were attended to, but they were not serious. Still their home was like a little Zoar, and they were all saved from destruction.

One spot in Antioch had as yet been saved from the fury of the Persians, and troops had been posted around it to secure it against intrusion; it was the legatine palace.

Eucrates was there in safety; he had been escorted by a Persian guard, from the amphitheatre, to his residence, and there he awaited the promised interview with Artabanus.

He had beheld from his retreat the conflagration of the city; the scenes he had witnessed had even startled, if not softened, his hard spirit, so unaccustomed to sympathize with the pangs of others. He knew it was all his doing; he knew that he had betrayed those committed to his charge,—that their blood lay at his door,—that not only Roman, but

Greek, his personal friends, if he had any, his kinsmen, the playmates of his youth, had all perished. Yet his chief concern was that Æmilius had, as he feared, escaped, and he especially meditated the asking his head of Artabanus; yet the signet ring, which, as he knew, the son of Sapor had given Æmilius, caused him to feel some uncertainty concerning the result of such an application.

Night fell upon him; he gazed from the terraces of his palace upon the Orontes, flowing redly as it caught the reflection of the conflagration, darkly, as streams of human blood defiled its pure waters. Around him he heard the distant groans of wounded and dying, and ever and anon the awful crash of some palace or temple yielding to the progress of the flames.

He retired to the inner apartments of the palace; his household, like that of Cornelius, had been hitherto exempted from the general massacre, and his slaves waited upon him as usual, but they were overcome by the horrors of the day, and showed it in each movement they made. He knew nothing concerning Milo or his other associates and fellow-conspirators, and dared not venture abroad to make enquiries.

He retired to rest at last, somewhat perplexed and alarmed at the absence of any message from the Persian leader, and tossed upon his couch restless and uneasy; he knew not why, but a presentiment of evil seemed upon him. Did coming events indeed cast their shadows before, or did the remembrance of his slaughtered fellow-citizens banish sleep?

He rose unrefreshed at the break of day, and awaited impatiently a summons from the conqueror.

It came at last in the shape of a Persian guard, to conduct him to the presence of Artabanus. To his surprise, they led him beyond the limits of the city, through roads once familiar, to the home of his boyhood, now become the head quarters of the Persian general.

Much surprised, Eucrates suffered the guard to conduct him through the atrium to the large dining hall; it was partially darkened by heavy curtains, but he saw that he was in the presence of Artabanus. He approached and bowed low.

"Thou art Eucrates, late legatus, and prospective satrap of Antioch," said a voice, which vibrated strangely upon the nerves of the Greek.

"I am, most noble Artabanus."

"And thou hast done thy work well; thou hast prepared our way before us, given thy people into our hands, and surely thy reward shall not tarry."

"I am the humble servant of Sapor, and but await his will."

"Trust him; he knows thee and thy worth right well."

And here he paused; then continued in tones which were not without emotion.

"I would fain compliment my foes upon the exquisite taste with which their homes are arranged; perhaps thou hast known this villa in old times?"

"It was the home of my boyhood."

"Strange; perhaps thou wilt conduct me over it, and explain the uses of the various chambers."

And Eucrates led Artabanus through chamber after chamber, through atrium, triclinium, and peristylium, commenting timidly upon their various uses, for he felt an indefinable awe of the Persian general, the tones of whose voice did not seem wholly un-

familiar to him; he had hardly dared to gaze fully upon the countenance of the conqueror.

"And now show me your lower apartments; I am curious to see how you lodge your slaves."

Eucrates obeyed, not without reluctance. They came to the little cell which had formerly been the sleeping apartment of Juba, and Artabanus displayed a singular interest in the little chamber, in which he lingered mysteriously.

But the remembrance of Juba was painfully vivid at that moment in the mind of Eucrates, although he knew not why, and he tried to pass the ergastulum without entering it, for there the unhappy slave had spent the night before his crucifixion.

"To what use do you put this cell?" interrupted Artabanus.

"It is the ergastulum, in which refractory slaves were confined."

"Indeed, a fit place; didst thou ever confine anyone here?"

"Sometimes. I hardly remember."

"Shew it me," said Artabanus.

They entered, the Persian guard lingering outside at a sign from Artabanus.

It was a dismal cell; our readers will remember it; a faint gleam of light struggled through the grating and illuminated the countenances of Persian and Greek. Artabanus closed the door.

"Eucrates," he said, in a voice husky with emotion, "years ago a poor slave spent what he thought to be his last night upon earth, in a miserable hole like this. His whole life had been one of unmerited suffering, but he found no mercy; he spent a night of agony, and in the morning was exposed upon a cross to die of

hunger, thirst, and pain. Didst thou ever know a similar case?"

Eucrates trembled, but did not answer.

"But he escaped; for he had friends who were faithful to him; he crossed the desert with travelling merchants; he entered the service of Persia, and lived but in the hope of becoming a scourge to the Roman race, and of repaying the master under whom the laws of that race had placed him. He has already accomplished one desire; the accomplishment of the other awaits him."

Eucrates was beginning to guess at the truth, to recognise the lineaments and tones of him who spoke; the drops of sweat bedewed his terror-stricken brow; he trembled like the aspen; his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth.

"No! No! it cannot be!" he gasped.

"What cannot be? should not justice be done? Say, what sentence shall the slave pronounce in turn upon his master?"

There was no answer. Artabanus marked the contortions of face and figure, and continued:

"Say, what sentence shall Juba pronounce upon Eucrates?"

There was a heavy fall; Eucrates had fainted.

It was evening, and once more the moon shone upon a cross, where one had stood many years before, upon an agonized figure whose groans and cries feebly penetrated the night air. But we must draw a veil over the scene. Righteous was the judgment upon the traitor, whatever were the motives of him who inflicted it. Who shall say what horrid thoughts of his betrayed and massacred fellow-citizens,—what imaginary phantoms, telling

of horror and despair,—thronged around that cross, until hunger, thirst, exposure, and finally madness, had done their work, and the corpse of the betrayer of Antioch tainted the air."

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

OUR tale now draws to a close, and we have but a few words to add upon the future fortunes of its chief characters, and of Antioch.

The tide of Persian conquest swept over Syria, Cilicia, and Cappadocia; their capitals, Tarsus and Cæsarea, with many other cities, shared the fate of Antioch; deep valleys were filled up by the bodies of the slain; crowds of prisoners perished for want of food and water, while some were driven, like herds of cattle, to the nearest streams that they might drink.

Cyriades was made the ruler of the western provinces of the empire under Sapor, who had followed the track of Artabanus with the main body of the Persian army. The victor, nevertheless, despaired of making a permanent conquest of the countries he overran, and only sought to burn, pillage, and destroy, leaving behind him a wasted desert, while he carried away the inhabitants and their treasures into hopeless captivity.

In the midst of this fearful desolation the Christians were the object of the special providence of

God; divinely warned, most of them were absent from Antioch in the day of its destruction, even as the children of God in Jerusalem found a Pella to which to retire during the siege of the city by Titus.

The unhappy Valerian found no mercy at the hands of Sapor, but was treated with every indignity cruelty could invent. He was borne about a captive, loaded with chains, and yet invested, in mockery, with the imperial purple, that in his person the majesty of Rome might be insulted. Those of his chief officers who had survived the battle shared his fate, until they sank beneath the weight of their misfortunes together with their hapless monarch. It is even said that he who had been hailed as a divinity was now confined in a cage, from which he was brought out to serve as a footstool to his insulting conqueror whensoever the latter mounted his horse. Many of the allies of Sapor besought that mercy might be shown to the fallen monarch, and that he might be made the pledge of peace rather than the object of insult; but Sapor was inflexible, and when at last Valerian sunk beneath the crushing burden life had become, he was flayed (some say while yet living,) and his skin, stuffed so as to retain the likeness of humanity, hung up in the principal Persian temple, as a trophy of Roman degradation and Persian supremacy. Alas! the unhappy monarch had lifted his hand against the Elect of God, and the stone falling upon him had ground him to powder.

Meanwhile Gallienus, his son, assumed the reins of power at Rome, lived in ease and luxury, and forgot the very existence of his father; no attempt was ever made to rescue the hapless Valerian.

Amidst the surrounding desolation, the villa of Cornelius was scrupulously respected by the Persians; such was the will of Chosroes, whose romantic generosity thus repaid the debt he owed to Æmilius.

But Cornelius and his family could not remain in the midst of such scenes of suffering and devastation. They left Syria, found means of embarkation at Seleucia, and sailed for Italy, where they took up their abode in a quiet and secluded villa in the lovely recesses of the Sabine hills, which formed a part of the patrimony of Cornelius.

Persecution had ceased since the death of Valerian, and Christians enjoyed a treacherous calm.

It will easily be anticipated that the family did not long remain in ignorance of the Gospel towards which they were so favourably disposed. Æmilius became the teacher of his parents, and he had the deep joy of beholding their baptism, together with that of Cornelia and Lentulus; but he shall speak for himself in a letter which he addressed about this time to his beloved Father in God, Cyril, who had been amongst the few who escaped both the sword and captivity after the siege of Nisibis, and was spending a short time in retreat near Jerusalem, gaining renewed strength for warfare, as his feet pressed the soil once made holy by the presence of the Incarnate Son of God.

"ÆMILIUS, *to his* FATHER IN GOD, *Health.*

"I NEED not tell you, my most dear Father, with what joy I heard of your safe deliverance from peril, and of your arrival in Palestine, the home of Chris-

tians, where I am present with you in heart, although not in body.

"I think daily of you, for I can never forget all that I owe you, from the day when you first rescued me from the wolves until the present hour.

"But chiefly do I remember that happy day when you met me in the woods near my father's villa, where, in utter bitterness of heart, a stranger to God, an outcast from Zion, I wandered in bitterness of spirit, until my Lord sent you to meet me, and you spoke of that Love which had already claimed your soul, and was so soon in boundless mercy to claim mine. I thank God for that day, but I can never thank Him enough; eternity alone will suffice to show forth His praise.

"And now He has added all that my heart can desire: my dear father, my dear mother, my dear sister, yes, and Lentulus also, were all baptized yesterday. Did you note the day? Yes, I am sure you did; it was the anniversary of the victory of that dear saint of God, Eteocles, to whom I owe myself, and more than myself. We especially chose that day, and if glorified spirits indeed ever leave their bright home to gaze upon the fruit of their intercessions and of their work on earth, truly his happy spirit was with us, amidst the guardian angels who claimed the new-born in the laver of Baptism.

"With what joy I stood beside the Font I cannot express in words; all the weary years of waiting, all the trouble and sorrow are now repaid tenfold with joy into my bosom. I thought of the day when I left my home to become an outcast and fugitive for the sake of Christ, and of the parting interview with my father in our gardens at Antioch, and the contrast made my joy yet more intense, nor could

I refrain from tears. And when I embraced them after all was over, one after the other, and heard my father's words,—'We are *one* again, my dear son; the Lord but sent you before us, as Joseph was sent into Egypt, to preserve life; and now, like the aged Jacob, I can but fall upon my son's neck, restored again to me, and weep,'—I was quite overcome; and surely our union is one now which death can never sever, for we are fellow-citizens of Zion.

"It was Dionysius, the Bishop of Rome, and successor of the martyred Xystus who baptized them; we have found in him, indeed, a father; he tells me that his sainted predecessor had left directions behind him, commending me to the care of his successor, should I survive my journey to the east: how can I thank God enough for the loving friends He has given me in His ministers here on earth! pray that I may be less unworthy of such paternal care.

"My dear sister, Cornelia, is to be married in a few days to Cæcilianus, a fellow-citizen of ours at Antioch, whose name you may remember, and who has been also recently baptised. He was present in the amphitheatre, on that dreadful occasion when the Persians entered the city, and it was he who threw me the sword which was in God's mercy the instrument of preserving my life. The fact came to the knowledge of Chosroes, who released him from captivity, and sent him after us to Rome: how romantic his generosity has been! may God reward him by bringing him to the true light.

"I can hardly omit to mention a circumstance I have just learned, which fills me with gratitude to that God who doeth wonders.

"You will remember that when I was crossing the desert, on my road from Antioch to the Euphrates, I lost my way, being called from my route by a voice whose tones resembled those of my dear mother.

"My life, and more than my own life, was thus saved; the caravan was almost destroyed by the Arabs, only a few escaping, and it fell to my lot in consequence to save the life of Chosroes.

"All this is familiar to you, as I often conversed with you on the subject; well, the other day I mentioned the circumstance in the presence of my parents, when I learned that at that very time, my mother was sleeping in the heat of the day and dreamed that she saw me in a desert, and that in some way it was revealed to her that I was in great danger, which caused her to utter my name aloud several times in her sleep, and my father heard her. On examination the dates perfectly agree.

"There is no persecution here now; Gallienus, the son and successor of Valerian, reigns in peace, forgetful of his father, who yet, alas, languishes in hopeless captivity; but even the heathen priests have been sobered by the frightful disgrace which has befallen one, to whom they promised victory because he had served their gods. 'As for the gods of the heathen they are but idols, but it is the Lord that made the heavens.'

"We live amongst the Sabine Hills, in a lovely and sequestred valley, and all the comforts we need, and more than we need, are ours; close by is a village inhabited by many of the faithful, and we meet daily to offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice,—the only thank-offering worthy of our loving Father and our God.

"We cannot, however, forget Antioch, and even in my dreams, the horrors of that last night come back sometimes vividly upon me; we never could gain full information concerning the fate of my unhappy cousin, the late legatus; God forgive him. They say Cyriades now reigns as the vassal of Sapor, King of Antioch.

Meanwhile each day brings us nearer to that meeting which shall precede no parting. I have nothing more to live for, and feel as if earth had no charm save love, and death no terrors, for I know that I and those whom I love are bound up in the bundle of Life with the Lord our God, the true life which Death cannot assail, for it is hidden with Christ in God.

"Yet I would fain have labour to undergo and danger to despise in His cause, Who claims my whole being. You will remember that as I have often told you, Eteocles foretold in that last interview, which I can never forget, that I should, like him, wear the martyr's crown: God grant it, I could desire no higher bliss.

"I have little to add. I trust we may meet again. Some day you may perhaps visit Rome, or the providence of God may yet restore Syria to us, in which case we should possibly return to our old home. I understand that it is yet spared from devastation through the influence of Chosroes; sad though its recent associations are, yet it is the country in which I was born to God, and the memory of Eteocles sheds over it a hallowing influence.

"While my father and mother live, I feel that my home must be with them; they claim me after so long a separation; the infirmities of age are already

manifest, but, as the calm deep river glides on towards the mighty ocean, so, gently and peacefully, do their lives glide on towards the ocean of eternity, that illimitable ocean which the love of God alone fills for those who love Him.

"God grant that we may all meet there. Farewell, my dear father in God.

"From our villa, near Reate, the 10th before the calends of November."

Our task is nearly completed.

Many years had passed away, and the tenth and last persecution had commenced.

Syria was again a portion of the Roman dominions; Antioch was re-built, and, forgetful of the fearful chastisement she had formerly received, again persecuted the Church of God.

Her judges and magistrates, as Eusebius informs us, excelled in cruelty; constantly inventing new tortures, as if there were prizes proposed for those who should surpass in devising cruelties.

On the Ides of November, A.D. 303, many martyrs suffered in the restored amphitheatre.

Amongst them an aged bishop was condemned to the stake, he was in his sixtieth year, and had served the Lord, like Timothy, from his youth. Difficult would it be to recognise in his venerable features the youth so well known to our readers, but the prophecy of Eteocles was thus fulfilled.

The heavenly shore was gained; love was tested by death; the consummation so heartily desired was realized.

Death was swallowed up in victory; the guard who conducted the martyr to his final trial found

him peacefully sleeping; they saw the features brighten as they gazed, a look of recognition passed over them and they heard the murmured words, "Father, Mother, Sister, Eteocles, for ever in the joy of the Lord. Amen."

His ashes were scattered over the waters of the Orontes, which flowed calmly by, as it did when as a boy he had sported on its banks. "In the sight of the unwise he seemed to die, but his hope was immortality."

"For ever with the Lord,
Amen, so let it be,
Life from the dead is in that word,
And immortality."

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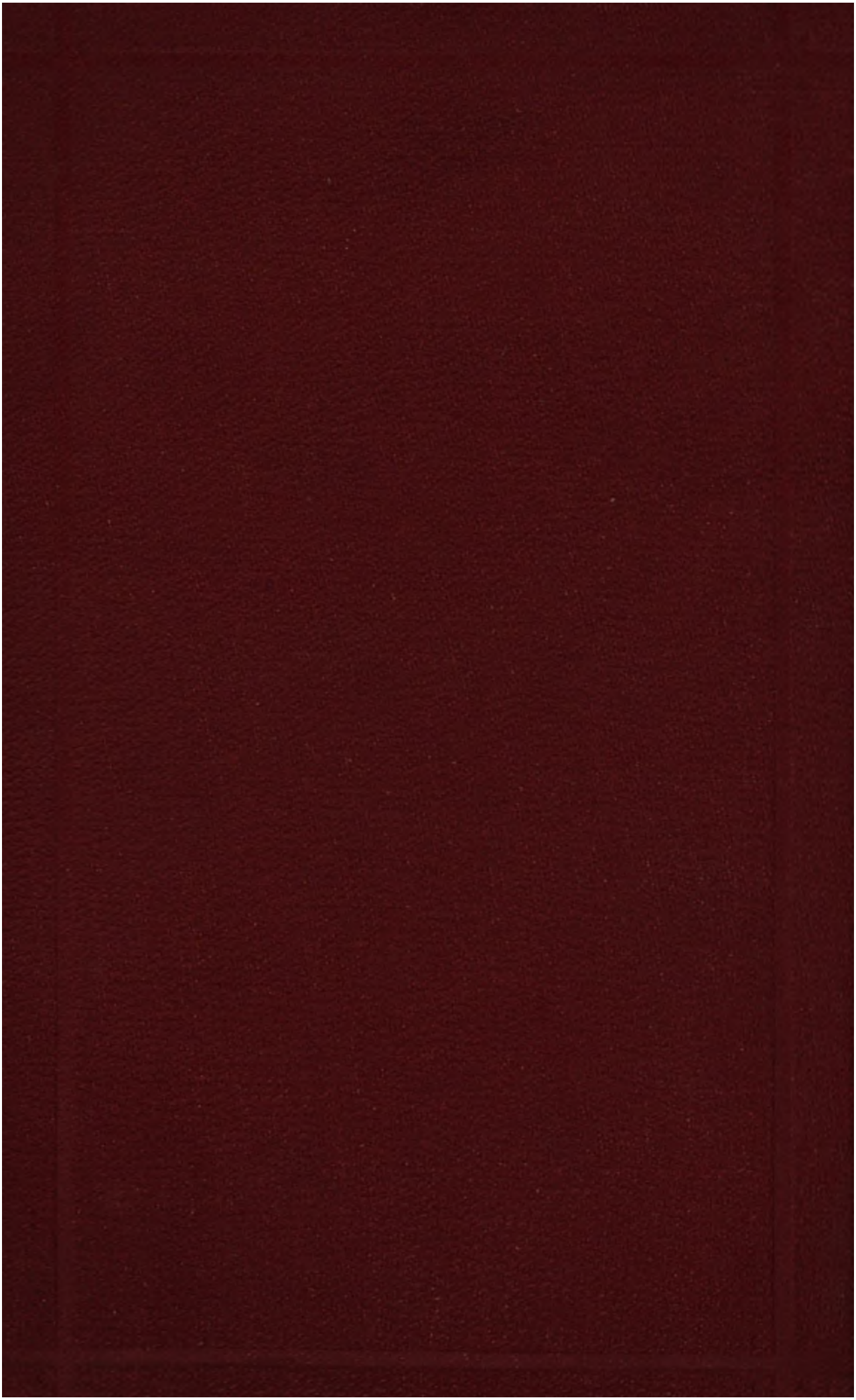
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