

## **CHAPTER 4 - THE CHURCH**

In the year 324, on the locality assigned by rumour to the martyrdom of St. Peter, and over the ruins of the Circus of Nero, Constantine erected the church called the Basilica of St. Peter.

For twelve centuries, this building, raised by a man infamous for his murders and his tyrannies, stood uninjured amid the shocks which during that long period devastated the rest of the city. After that time it was removed, tottering to its base from its own reverend and illustrious age, by Pope Julius II, to make way for the foundations of the modern church.

It is towards this structure of twelve hundred years' duration, erected by hands stained with blood, and yet preserved as a star of peace in the midst of stormy centuries of war, that we would direct the reader's attention. What art has done for the modern church, time has effected for the ancient. If the one is majestic to the eye by its grandeur, the other is hallowed to the memory by its age.

As this church by its rise commemorated the triumphant establishment of Christianity as the religion of Rome, so in its progress it reflected every change wrought in the spirit of the new worship by the ambition, the prodigality, or the frivolity of the priests. At first it stood awful and imposing, beautiful in all its parts as the religion for whose glory it was built. Vast porphyry colonnades decorated its approaches, and surrounded a fountain whose waters issued from the representation of a gigantic pine-tree in bronze. Its double rows of aisles were each supported by forty-eight columns of precious marble. Its flat ceiling was adorned with beams of gilt metal, rescued from the pollution of heathen temples. Its walls were decorated with large paintings of religious subjects, and its tribunal was studded with elegant mosaics. Thus it rose, simple and yet sublime, awful and yet alluring; in this its beginning, a type of the dawn of the worship which it was elevated to represent. But when, flushed with success, the priests seized on Christianity as their path to politics and their introduction to power, the aspect of the church gradually began to change. As, slowly and insensibly, ambitious man heaped the garbage of his mysteries, his doctrines, and his disputes, about the pristine purity of the structure given him by God, so, one by one, gaudy adornments and meretricious alterations arose to sully the once majestic basilica, until the threatening and reproving apparition of the pagan Julian, when both Church and churchmen received in their corrupt progress a sudden and impressive check.

The short period of the revival of idolatry once passed over, the priests,

unmoved by the warning they had received, returned with renewed vigour to confuse that which both in their Gospel and their Church had been once simple. Day by day they put forth fresh treatises, aroused fierce controversies, subsided into new sects; and day by day they altered more and more the once noble aspect of the ancient basilica. They hung their nauseous relics on its mighty walls, they stuck their tiny tapers about its glorious pillars, they wreathed their tawdry fringes around its massive altars. Here they polished, there they embroidered. Wherever there was a window, they curtained it with gaudy cloths; wherever there was a statue, they bedizened it with artificial flowers; wherever there was a solemn recess, they outraged its religious gloom with intruding light; until (arriving at the period we write of) they succeeded so completely in changing the aspect of the building, that it looked, within, more like a vast pagan toyshop than a Christian church. Here and there, it is true, a pillar or an altar rose unencumbered as of old, appearing as much at variance with the frippery that surrounded it as a text of Scripture quoted in a sermon of the time. But as regarded the general aspect of the basilica, the decent glories of its earlier days seemed irrevocably departed and destroyed.

After what has been said of the edifice, the reader will have little difficulty in imagining that the square in which it stood lost whatever elevation of character it might once have possessed, with even greater rapidity than the church itself. If the cathedral now looked like an immense toyshop, assuredly its attendant colonnades had the appearance of the booths of an enormous fair.

The day, whose decline we have hinted at in the preceding chapter, was fast verging towards its close, as the inhabitants of the streets on the western bank of the Tiber prepared to join the crowds that they beheld passing by their windows in the direction of the Basilica of St. Peter. The cause of this sudden confluence of the popular current in once common direction was made sufficiently apparent to all inquirers who happened to be near a church or a public building, by the appearance in such situations of a large sheet of vellum elaborately illuminated, raised on a high pole, and guarded from contact with the inquisitive rabble by two armed soldiers. The announcements set forth in these strange placards were all of the same nature and directed to the same end. In each of them the Bishop of Rome informed his 'pious and honourable brethren', the inhabitants of the city, that, as the next day was the anniversary of the Martyrdom of St. Luke, the vigil would necessarily be held on that evening in the Basilica of St. Peter; and that, in consideration of the importance of the occasion, there would be exhibited, before the commencement of the ceremony, those precious relics connected with the death of the saint, which had become the inestimable

inheritance of the Church; and which consisted of a branch of the olive-tree to which St. Luke was hung, a piece of the noose--including the knot--which had been passed round his neck, and a picture of the Apotheosis of the Virgin painted by his own hand. After some sentences expressive of lamentation for the sufferings of the saint, which nobody read, and which it is unnecessary to reproduce here, the proclamation went on to state that a sermon would be preached in the course of the vigil, and that at a later hour the great chandelier, containing two thousand four hundred lamps, would be lit to illuminate the church. Finally, the worthy bishop called upon all members of his flock, in consideration of the solemnity of the day, to abstain from sensual pleasures, in order that they might the more piously and worthily contemplate the sacred objects submitted to their view, and digest the spiritual nourishment to be offered to their understandings.

From the specimen we have already given of the character of the populace of Rome, it will perhaps be unnecessary to say that the great attractions presented by this theological bill of fare were the relics and the chandelier. Pulpit eloquence and vigil solemnities alone must have long exhibited their more sober allurements, before they could have drawn into the streets a fiftieth part of the immense crowd that now hurried towards the desecrated basilica. Indeed, so vast was the assemblage soon congregated, that the advanced ranks of sightseers had already filled the church to overflowing, before those in the rear had come within view of the colonnades.

However dissatisfied the unsuccessful portion of the citizens might feel at their exclusion from the church, they found a powerful counter-attraction in the amusements going forward in the Place, the occupants of which seemed thoroughly regardless of the bishop's admonitions upon the sobriety of behaviour due to the solemnity of the day. As if in utter defiance of the decency and order recommended by the clergy, popular exhibitions of all sorts were set up on the broad flagstones of the great space before the church. Street dancing-girls exercised at every available spot those 'gliding gyrations' so eloquently condemned by the worthy Ammianus Marcellinus of orderly and historical memory. Booths crammed with relics of doubtful authenticity, baskets filled with neat manuscript abstracts of furiously controversial pamphlets, pagan images regenerated into portraits of saints, pictorial representations of Arians writhing in damnation, and martyrs basking in haloes of celestial light, tempted, in every direction, the more pious among the spectators. Cooks perambulated with their shops on their backs; rival slave-merchants shouted petitions for patronage; wine-sellers taught Bacchanalian philosophy from the tops of their casks; poets recited compositions for sale; sophisters held arguments destined to convert the wavering and perplex the ignorant.

Incessant motion and incessant noise seemed to be the sole compensations sought by the multitude for the disappointment of exclusion from the church. If a stranger, after reading the proclamation of the day, had proceeded to the basilica, to feast his eyes on the contemplation of the illustrious aggregate of humanity, entitled by the bishop 'his pious and honourable brethren,' he must, on mixing at this moment with the assemblage, have either doubted the truth of the episcopal appellation, or have given the citizens credit for that refinement of intrinsic worth which is of too elevated a nature to influence the character of the outward man.

At the time when the sun set, nothing could be more picturesque than the distant view of this joyous scene. The deep red rays of the departing luminary cast their radiance, partly from behind the church, over the vast multitude in the Place. Brightly and rapidly the rich light roved over the waters that leaped towards it from the fountain in all the loveliness of natural and evanescent form. Bathed in that brilliant glow, the smooth porphyry colonnades reflected, chameleon like, ethereal and varying hues; the white marble statues became suffused in a delicate rose-colour, and the sober-tinted trees gleamed in the innermost of their leafy depths as if steeped in the exhalations of a golden mist. While, contrasting strangely with the wondrous radiance around them, the huge bronze pine-tree in the middle of the Place, and the wide front of the basilica, rose up in gloomy shadow, indefinite and exaggerated, lowering like evil spirits over the joyous beauty of the rest of the scene, and casting their great depths of shade into the midst of the light whose dominion they despised. Beheld from a distance, this wild combination of vivid brightness and solemn gloom; these buildings, at one place darkened till they looked gigantic, at another lightened till they appeared ethereal; these crowded groups, seeming one great moving mass gleaming at this point in radiant light, obscured at that in thick shadow, made up a whole so incongruous and yet so beautiful, so grotesque and yet so sublime, that the scene looked, for the moment, more like some inhabited meteor, half eclipsed by its propinquity to earth, than a mortal and material prospect.

The beauties of this atmospheric effect were of far too serious and sublime a nature to interest the multitude in the Place. Out of the whole assemblage, but two men watched that glorious sunset with even an appearance of the admiration and attention which it deserved. One was the landholder whose wrongs were related in the preceding chapter--the other his remarkable friend.

These two men formed a singular contrast to each other, both in demeanour

and appearance, as they gazed forth upon the crimson heaven. The landholder was an under-sized, restless-looking man, whose features, naturally sharp, were now distorted by a fixed expression of misery and discontent. His quick, penetrating glance wandered incessantly from place to place, perceiving all things, but resting on none. In his attention to the scene before him, he appeared to have been led more by the influence of example than by his own spontaneous feelings; for ever and anon he looked impatiently round upon his friend as if expecting him to speak--but no word or movement escaped his thoughtful companion. Occupied exclusively in his own contemplations, he appeared wholly insensible to any ordinary outward appeal.

In age and appearance this individual was in the decline of life; for he had numbered sixty years, his hair was completely grey, and his face was covered with deep wrinkles. Yet, in spite of these disadvantages, he was in the highest sense of the word a handsome man. Though worn and thin, his features were still bold and regular; and there was an elevation about the habitual mournfulness of his expression, and an intelligence about his somewhat severe and earnest eyes, that bore eloquent testimony to the superiority of his intellectual powers. As he now stood gazing fixedly out into the glowing sky, his tall, meagre figure half supported upon his staff, his lips firmly compressed, his brow slightly frowning, and his attitude firm and motionless, the most superficial observer must have felt immediately that he looked on no ordinary being. The history of a life of deep thought--perhaps of long sorrow--seemed written in every lineament of his meditative countenance; and there was a natural dignity in his manner, which evidently restrained his restless companion from offering any determined interruption to the course of his reflections.

Slowly and gorgeously the sun had continued to wane in the horizon until he was now lost to view. As his last rays sunk behind the distant hills, the stranger started from his reverie and approached the landholder, pointing with his staff towards the fast-fading brightness of the western sky.

'Probus,' said he, in a low, melancholy voice, 'as I looked on that sunset I thought on the condition of the Church.'

'I see little in the Church to think of, or in the sunset to observe,' replied his companion.

'How pure, how vivid,' murmured the other, scarcely heeding the landholder's remark, 'was the light which that sun cast upon this earth at our feet! How nobly for a time its brightness triumphed over the shadows

around; and yet, in spite of the promise of that radiance, how swiftly did it fade ere long in its conflict with the gloom--how thoroughly, even now, has it departed from the earth, and withdrawn the beauty of its glory from the heavens! Already the shadows are lengthening around us, and shrouding in their darkness every object in the Place. But a short hour hence, and--should no moon arise--the gloom of night will stretch unresisted over Rome!

'To what purpose do you tell me this?'

'Are you not reminded, by what we have observed, of the course of the worship which it is our privilege to profess? Does not that first beautiful light denote its pure and perfect rise; that short conflict between the radiance and the gloom, its successful preservation, by the Apostles and the Fathers; that rapid fading of the radiance, its desecration in later times; and the gloom which now surrounds us, the destruction which has encompassed it in this age we live in?--a destruction which nothing can avert but a return to that pure first faith that should now be the hope of our religion, as the moon is the hope of night!'

'How should we reform? Do people who have no liberties care about a religion? Who is to teach them?'

'I have--I will. It is the purpose of my life to restore to them the holiness of the ancient Church; to rescue them from the snare of traitors to the faith, whom men call priests. They shall learn through me that the Church knew no adornment once, but the presence of the pure; that the priest craved no finer vestment than his holiness; that the Gospel, which once taught humility and now raises dispute, was in former days the rule of faith--sufficient for all wants, powerful over all difficulties. Through me they shall know that in times past it was the guardian of the heart; through me they shall see that in times present it is the plaything of the proud; through me they shall fear that in times future it may become the exile of the Church! To this task I have vowed myself; to overthrow this idolatry--which, like another paganism, rises among us with its images, its relics, its jewels, and its gold--I will devote my child, my life, my energies, and my possessions. From this attempt I will never turn aside--from this determination I will never flinch. While I have a breath of life in me, I will persevere in restoring to this abandoned city the true worship of the Most High!'

He ceased abruptly. The intensity of his agitation seemed suddenly to deny to him the faculty of speech. Every muscle in the frame of that stern, melancholy man quivered at the immortal promptings of the soul within him. There was something almost feminine in his universal susceptibility to

the influence of one solitary emotion. Even the rough, desperate landholder felt awed by the enthusiasm of the being before him, and forgot his wrongs, terrible as they were--and his misery, poignant as it was--as he gazed upon his companion's face.

For some minutes neither of the men said more. Soon, however, the last speaker calmed his agitation with the facility of a man accustomed to stifle the emotions that he cannot crush, and advancing to the landholder, took him sorrowfully by the hand.

'I see, Probus, that I have amazed you,' said he; 'but the Church is the only subject on which I have no discretion. In all other matters I have conquered the rashness of my early manhood; in this I have to wrestle with my hastier nature still. When I look on the mockeries that are acting around us; when I behold a priesthood deceivers, a people deluded, a religion defiled, then, I confess it, my indignation overpowers my patience, and I burn to destroy, where I ought only to hope to reform.'

'I knew you always violent of imagination; but when I last saw you your enthusiasm was love. Your wife--'

'Peace! She deceived me!'

'Your child--'

'Lives with me at Rome.'

'I remember her an infant, when, fourteen years since, I was your neighbour in Gaul. On my departure from the province, you had just returned from a journey into Italy, unsuccessful in your attempts to discover there a trace either of your parents, or of that elder brother whose absence you were wont so continually to lament. Tell me, have you, since that period, discovered the members of your ancient household? Hitherto you have been so occupied in listening to the history of my wrongs that you have scarcely spoken of the changes in your life since we last met.'

'If, Probus, I have been silent to you concerning myself, it is because for me retrospection has little that attracts. While yet it was in my power to return to those parents whom I deserted in my boyhood, I thought not of repentance; and now that they must be but too surely lost to me, my yearning towards them is of no avail. Of my brother, from whom I parted in a moment of childish jealousy and anger, and whose pardon and love I would give up even my ambition to acquire, I have never yet discovered a

trace. Atonement to those whom I injured in early life is a privilege denied to the prayers of my age. From my parents and my brother I departed unblest, and unforgiven by them I feel that I am doomed to die! My life has been careless, useless, godless, passing from rapine and violence to luxury and indolence, and leading me to the marriage which I exulted in when I last saw you, but which I now feel was unworthy alike in its motives and its results. But blessed and thrice blessed by that last calamity of my wicked existence, for it opened my eyes to the truth--it made a Christian of me while I was yet alive!

'Is it thus that the Christian can view his afflictions? I would, then, that I were a Christian like you!' murmured the landholder, in low, earnest tones.

'It was in those first days, Probus,' continued the other, 'when I found myself deserted and dishonoured, left alone to be the guardian of my helpless child, exiled for ever from a home that I had myself forsaken, that I repented me in earnest of my misdeeds, that I sought wisdom from the book of salvation, and the conduct of life from the Fathers of the Church. It was at that time that I determined to devote my child, like Samuel of old, to the service of heaven, and myself to the reformation of our degraded worship. As I have already told you, I forsook my abode and changed my name (remember it is as 'Numerian' that you must henceforth address me), that of my former self no remains might be left, that of my former companions not one might ever discover and tempt me again. With incessant care have I shielded my daughter from the contamination of the world. As a precious jewel in a miser's hands she has been watched and guarded in her father's house. Her destiny is to soothe the afflicted, to watch the sick, to succour the forlorn, when I, her teacher, have restored to the land the dominion of its ancient faith and the guidance of its faultless Gospel. We have neither of us an affection or a hope that can bind us to the things of earth. Our hearts look both towards heaven; our expectations are only from on high!'

'Do not set your hopes too firmly on your child. Remember how the nobles of Rome have destroyed the household I once had, and tremble for your own.'

'I have no fear for my daughter; she is cared for in my absence by one who is vowed to aid me in my labours for the Church. It is now nearly a year since I first met Ulpius, and from that time forth he has devoted himself to my service and watched over my child.'

'Who is this Ulpius, that you should put such faith in him?'



'He is a man of age like mine. I found him, like me, worn down by the calamities of his early life, and abandoned, as I had once been, to the delusions of the pagan gods. He was desolate, suffering, forlorn, and I had pity on him in his misery. I proved to him that the worship he still professed was banished for its iniquities from the land; that the religion which had succeeded it had become defiled by man, and that there remained but one faith for him to choose, if he would be saved--the faith of the early Church. He heard me and was converted. From that moment he has served me patiently and helped me willingly. Under the roof where I assemble the few who as yet are true believers, he is always the first to come and the last to remain. No word of anger has ever crossed his lips--no look of impatience has ever appeared in his eyes. Though sorrowful, he is gentle; though suffering, he is industrious. I have trusted him with all I possess, and I glory in my credulity! Ulpius is incorruptible!'

'And your daughter?--is Ulpius revered by her as he is respected by you?'

'She knows that her duty is to love whom I love, and to avoid whom I avoid. Can you imagine that a Christian virgin has any feelings disobedient to her father's wishes? Come to my house; judge with your own eyes of my daughter and my companion. You, whose misfortunes have left you no home, shall find one, if you will, with me. Come then and labour with me in my great undertaking! You will withdraw your mind from the contemplation of your woes, and merit by your devotion the favour of the Most High.'

'No, Numerian, I will still be independent, even of my friends! Nor Rome nor Italy are abiding-places for me. I go to another land to abide among another people, until the arms of a conqueror shall have restored freedom to the brave and protection to the honest throughout the countries of the Empire.'

'Probus, I implore you stay!'

'Never! My determination is taken, Numerian--farewell!'

For a few minutes Numerian stood motionless, gazing wistfully in the direction taken by his companion on his departure. At first an expression of grief and pity softened the austerity which seemed the habitual characteristic of his countenance when in repose, but soon these milder and tenderer feelings appeared to vanish from his heart as suddenly as they had arisen; his features reassumed their customary sternness, and he muttered to himself as he mixed with the crowd struggling onwards in the direction of the basilica: 'Let him depart unregretted; he has denied himself to the service of his Maker. He should no longer be my friend.'

In this sentence lay the index to the character of the man. His existence was one vast sacrifice, one scene of intrepid self-immolation. Although, in the brief hints at the events of his life which he had communicated to his friend, he had exaggerated the extent of his errors, he had by no means done justice to the fervour of his penitence--a penitence which outstripped the usual boundaries of repentance, and only began in despair to terminate in fanaticism. His desertion of his father's house (into the motives of which it is not our present intention to enter), and his long subsequent existence of violence and excess, indisposed his naturally strong passions to submit to the slightest restraint. In obedience to their first impulses, he contracted, at a mature age, a marriage with a woman thoroughly unworthy of the ardent admiration that she had inspired. When he found himself deceived and dishonoured by her, the shock of such an affliction thrilled through his whole being--crushed all his energies--struck him prostrate, heart and mind, at one blow. The errors of his youth, committed in his prosperity with moral impunity, reacted upon him in his adversity with an influence fatal to his future peace. His repentance was darkened by despondency; his resolutions were unbrightened by hope. He flew to religion as the suicide flies to the knife--in despair.

Leaving all remaining peculiarities in Numerian's character to be discussed at a future opportunity, we will now follow him in his passage through the crowd, to the entrance of the basilica--continuing to designate him, here and elsewhere, by the name which he had assumed on his conversion, and by which he had insisted on being addressed during his interview with the fugitive landholder.

Although at the commencement of his progress towards the church, our enthusiast found himself placed among the hindermost of the members of the advancing throng, he soon contrived so thoroughly to outstrip his dilatory and discursive neighbours as to gain, with little delay, the steps of the sacred building. Here, in common with many others, he was compelled to stop, while those nearest the basilica squeezed their way through its stately doors. In such a situation his remarkable figure could not fail to be noticed, and he was silently recognised by many of the bystanders, some of whom looked on him with wonder, and some with aversion. Nobody, however, approached or spoke to him. Every one felt the necessity of shunning a man whose bold and daily exposures of the abuses of the Church placed in incessant peril his liberty, and even his life.

Among the bystanders who surrounded Numerian, there were nevertheless two who did not remain content with carelessly avoiding any communication

with the intrepid and suspected reformer. These two men belonged to the lowest order of the clergy, and appeared to be occupied in cautiously watching the actions and listening to the conversation of the individuals immediately around them. The instant they beheld Numerian they moved so as to elude his observation, taking care at the same time to occupy such a position as enabled them to keep in view the object of their evident distrust.

'Look, Osius,' said one, 'that man is here again!'

'And doubtless with the same motives which brought him here yesterday,' replied the other. 'You will see that he will again enter the church, listen to the service, retire to his little chapel near the Pincian Mount, and there, before his ragged mob of adherents, attack the doctrines which our brethren have preached, as we know he did last night, and as we suspect he will continue to do until the authorities think proper to give the signal for his imprisonment.'

'I marvel that he should have been permitted to persist so long a time as he has in his course of contumacy towards the Church. Have we not evidence enough in his writings alone to convict him of heresy? The carelessness of the bishop upon such a matter as this is quite inexplicable!'

'You should consider, Numerian not being a priest, that the carelessness about our interests lies more with the senate than the bishop. What time our nobles can spare from their debaucheries has been lately given to discussions on the conduct of the Emperor in retiring to Ravenna, and will now be dedicated to penetrating the basis of this rumour about the Goths. Besides, even were they at liberty, what care the senate about theological disputes? They only know this Numerian as a citizen of Rome, a man of some influence and possessions, and, consequently, a person of political importance as a member of the population. In addition to which, it would be no easy task for us at the present moment to impugn the doctrines broached by our assailant; for the fellow has a troublesome facility of supporting what he says by the Bible. Believe me, in this matter, our only way of righting ourselves will be to convict him of scandal against the highest dignitaries of the Church.'

'The order that we have lately received to track his movements and listen to his discourses, leads me to believe that our superiors are of your opinion.'

'Whether my convictions are correct or not, of this I feel assured--that his days of liberty are numbered. It was but a few hours ago that I saw the

bishop's chamberlain's head-assistant, and he told me that he had heard, through the crevice of a door--'

'Hush! he moves; he is pressing forward to enter the church. You can tell me what you were about to say as we follow him. Quick! let us mix with the crowd.'

Ever enthusiastic in the performance of their loathsome duties, these two discreet pastors of a Christian flock followed Numerian with the most elaborate caution into the interior of the sacred building.

Although the sun still left a faint streak of red in the western sky, and the moon had as yet scarcely risen, the great chandelier of two thousand four hundred lamps, mentioned by the bishop in his address to the people, was already alight. In the days of its severe and sacred beauty, the appearance of the church would have suffered fatally by this blaze of artificial brilliancy; but now that the ancient character of the basilica was completely changed, now that from a solemn temple it had been altered to the semblance of a luxurious palace, it gained immensely by its gaudy illumination. Not an ornament along the vast extent of its glorious nave but glittered in vivid distinctness in the dazzling light that poured downwards from the roof. The gilded rafters, the smooth inlaid marble pillars, the rich hangings of the windows, the jewelled candlesticks on the altars, the pictures, the statues, the bronzes, the mosaics, each and all glowed with a steady and luxurious transparency absolutely intoxicating to the eye. Not a trace of wear, not a vestige of tarnish now appeared on any object. Each portion of the nave to which the attention was directed appeared too finely, spotlessly radiant, ever to have been touched by mortal hands. Entranced and bewildered, the observation roamed over the surface of the brilliant scene, until, wearied by the unbroken embellishment of the prospect, it wandered for repose upon the dimly lighted aisles, and dwelt with delight upon the soft shadows that hovered about their distant pillars, and the gliding forms that peopled their dusky recesses, or loitered past their lofty walls.

At the moment when Numerian entered the basilica, a part of the service had just concluded. The last faint echo from the voices of the choir still hung upon the incense-laden air, and the vast masses of the spectators were still grouped in their listening and various attitudes, as the devoted reformer looked forth upon the church. Even he, stern as he was, seemed for a moment subdued by the ineffable enchantment of the scene; but ere long, as if displeased with his own involuntary emotions of admiration, his brow contracted, and he sighed heavily, as (still followed by the attentive spies) he sought the comparative seclusion of the aisles.

During the interval between the divisions of the service, the congregation occupied themselves in staring at the relics, which were enclosed in a silver cabinet with crystal doors, and placed on the top of the high altar. Although it was impossible to obtain a satisfactory view of these ecclesiastical treasures, they nevertheless employed the attention of every one until the appearance of a priest in the pulpit gave signal of the commencement of the sermon, and admonished all those who had seats to secure them without delay.

Passing through the ranks of the auditors of the sermon--some of whom were engaged in counting the lights in the chandelier, to be certain that the bishop had not defrauded them of one out of the two thousand four hundred lamps; others in holding whispered conversations, and opening small boxes of sweetmeats--we again conduct the reader to the outside of the church.

The assemblage here had by this time much diminished; the shadows flung over the ground by the lofty colonnades had deepened and increased; and in many of the more remote recesses of the Place hardly a human being was to be observed. At one of these extremities, where the pillars terminated in the street and the obscurity was most intense, stood a solitary old man keeping himself cautiously concealed in the darkness, and looking out anxiously upon the public way immediately before him.

He had waited but a short time when a handsome chariot, preceded by a body-guard of gaily-attired slaves, stopped within a few paces of his lurking-place, and the voice of the person it contained pronounced audibly the following words:--

'No! no! Drive on--we are later than I thought. If I stay to see this illumination of the basilica, I shall not be in time to receive my guests for to-night's banquet. Besides, this inestimable kitten of the breed most worshipped by the ancient Egyptians has already taken cold, and I would not for the world expose the susceptible animal any longer than is necessary to the dampness of the night-air. Drive on, good Carrio, drive on!'

The old man scarcely waited for the conclusion of this speech before he ran up to the chariot, where he was immediately confronted by two heads--one that of Vetrano the senator, the other that of a glossy black kitten adorned with a collar of rubies, and half enveloped in its master's ample robes. Before the astonished noble could articulate a word, the man whispered in hoarse, hurried accents, 'I am Ulpius--dismiss your servants--I have something important to say!'

'Ha! my worthy Ulpius! You have a most unhappy faculty of delivering a message with the manner of an assassin! But I must pardon your unpleasant abruptness in consideration of your diligence. My excellent Carrio, If you value my approbation, remove your companions and yourself out of hearing!'

The freedman yielded instant obedience to his master's mandate. The following conversation then took place, the strange man opening it thus:--

'You remember your promise?'

'I do.'

'Upon your honour, as a nobleman and a senator, you are prepared to abide by it whenever it is necessary?'

'I am.'

'Then at the dawn of morning meet me at the private gate of your palace garden, and I will conduct you to Antonina's bedchamber.'

'The time will suit me. But why at the dawn of morning?'

'Because the Christian dotard will keep a vigil until midnight, which the girl will most probably attend. I wished to tell you this at your palace, but I heard there that you had gone to Aricia, and would return by way of the basilica; so I posted myself to intercept you thus.'

'Industrious Ulpius!'

'Remember your promise!'

Vetranio leaned forward to reply, but Ulpius was gone.

As the senator again commanded his equipage to move on, he looked anxiously around him, as if once more expecting to see his strange adherent still lurking near the chariot. He only perceived, however, a man whom he did not know, followed by two other, walking rapidly past him. They were Numerian and the spies.

'At last, my projects are approaching consummation,' exclaimed Vetranio to himself, as he and his kitten rolled off in the chariot. 'It is well that I

thought of securing possession of Julia's villa to-day, for I shall now, assuredly, want to use it to-morrow. Jupiter! What a mass of dangers, contradictions, and mysteries encompass this affair! When I think that I, who pride myself on my philosophy, have quitted Ravenna, borrowed a private villa, leagued myself with an uncultivated plebeian, and all for the sake of a girl who has already deceived my expectations by gaining me as a music-master without admitting me as a lover, I am positively astonished at my own weakness! Still it must be owned that the complexion my adventure has lately assumed renders it of some interest in itself. The mere pleasure of penetrating the secrets of this Numerian's household is by no means the least among the numerous attraction of my design. How has he gained his influence over the girl? Why does he keep her in such strict seclusion? Who is this old half-frantic, unceremonious man-monster calling himself Ulpian; refusing all reward for his villainy; raving about a return to the old religion of the gods; and exulting in the promise he has extorted from me, as a good pagan, to support the first restoration of the ancient worship that may be attempted in Rome? Where does he come from? Why does he outwardly profess himself a Christian? What sent him into Numerian's service? By the girdle of Venus! everything connected with the girl is as incomprehensible as herself! But patience--patience! A few hours more, and these mysteries will be revealed. In the meantime, let me think of my banquet, and of its presiding deity, the Nightingale Sauce!