

## **CHAPTER 6 - AN APPRENTICESHIP TO THE TEMPLE**

The action of our characters during the night included in the last two chapters has now come to a pause. Vetrano is awaiting his guests for the banquet; Numerian is in the chapel, preparing for the discourse that he is to deliver to his friends; Ulpius is meditating in his master's house; Antonina is stretched upon her couch, caressing the precious fragment that she had saved from the ruins of her lute. All the immediate agents of our story are, for the present, in repose.

It is our purpose to take advantage of this interval of inaction, and direct the reader's attention to a different country from that selected as the scene of our romance, and to such historical events of past years as connect themselves remarkably with the early life of Numerian's perfidious convert. This man will be found a person of great importance in the future conduct of our story. It is necessary to the comprehension of his character, and the penetration of such of his purposes as have been already hinted at, and may subsequently appear, that the long course of his existence should be traced upwards to its source.

It was in the reign of Julian, when the gods of the Pagan achieved their last victory over the Gospel of the Christian, that a decently attired man, leading by the hand a handsome boy of fifteen years of age, entered the gates of Alexandria, and proceeded hastily towards the high priest's dwelling in the Temple of Serapis.

After a stay of some hours at his destination, the man left the city alone as hastily as he entered it, and was never after seen at Alexandria. The boy remained in the abode of the high priest until the next day, when he was solemnly devoted to the service of the temple.

The boy was the young Emilius, afterwards called Ulpius. He was nephew to the high priest, to whom he had been confided by his father, a merchant of Rome.

Ambition was the ruling passion of the father of Emilius. It had prompted him to aspire to every distinction granted to the successful by the state, but it had not gifted him with the powers requisite to turn his aspirations in any instance into acquisitions. He passed through existence a disappointed man, planning but never performing, seeing his more fortunate brother rising to the highest distinction in the priesthood, and finding himself irretrievably condemned to exist in the affluent obscurity ensured to him by his mercantile pursuits.

When his brother Macrinus, on Julian's accession to the imperial throne, arrived at the pinnacle of power and celebrity as high priest of the Temple of Serapis, the unsuccessful merchant lost all hope of rivalling his relative in the pursuit of distinction. His insatiable ambition, discarded from himself, now settled on one of his infant sons. He determined that his child should be successful where he had failed. Now that his brother had secured the highest elevation in the temple, no calling could offer more direct advantages to a member of his household than the priesthood. His family had been from their earliest origin rigid Pagans. One of them had already attained to the most distinguished honours of his gorgeous worship. He determined that another should rival his kinsman, and that that other should be his eldest son.

Firm in this resolution, he at once devoted his child to the great design which he now held continually in view. He knew well that Paganism, revived though it was, was not the universal worship that it had been; that it was now secretly resisted, and might soon be openly opposed, by the persecuted Christians throughout the Empire; and that if the young generation were to guard it successfully from all future encroachments, and to rise securely to its highest honours, more must be exacted from them than the easy attachment to the ancient religion require from the votaries of former days. Then, the performance of the most important offices in the priesthood was compatible with the possession of military or political rank. Now, it was to the temple, and to the temple only, that the future servant of the gods should be devoted. Resolving thus, the father took care that all the son's occupations and rewards should, from his earliest years, be in some way connected with the career for which he was intended. His childish pleasures were to be conducted to sacrifices and auguries; his childish playthings and prizes were images of the deities. No opposition was offered on the boy's part to this plan of education. Far different from his younger brother, whose turbulent disposition defied all authority, he was naturally docile; and his imagination, vivid beyond his years, was easily led captive by any remarkable object presented to it. With such encouragement, his father became thoroughly engrossed by the occupation of forming him for his future existence. His mother's influence over him was jealously watched; the secret expression of her love, of her sorrow, at the prospect of parting with him, was ruthlessly suppressed whenever it was discovered; and his younger brother was neglected, almost forgotten, in order that the parental watchfulness might be entirely and invariably devoted to the eldest son.

When Emilius had numbered fifteen years, his father saw with delight that the time had come when he could witness the commencement of the

realisation of all his projects. The boy was removed from home, taken to Alexandria, and gladly left, by his proud and triumphant father, under the especial guardianship of Macrinus, the high priest.

The chief of the temple full sympathised in his brother's designs for the young Emilius. As soon as the boy had entered on his new occupations, he was told that he must forget all that he had left behind him at Rome; that he must look upon the high priest as his father, and upon the temple, henceforth, as his home; and that the sole object of his present labours and future ambition must be to rise in the service of the gods. Nor did Macrinus stop here. So thoroughly anxious was he to stand to his pupil in the place of a parent, and to secure his allegiance by withdrawing him in every way from the world in which he had hitherto lived, that he even changed his name, giving to him one of his own appellations, and describing it as a privilege to stimulate him to future exertions. From the boy Emilius, he was now permanently transformed to the student Ulpus.

With such a natural disposition as we have already described, and under such guardianship as that of the high priest, there was little danger that Ulpus would disappoint the unusual expectations which had been formed of him. His attention to his new duties never relaxed; his obedience to his new masters never wavered. Whatever Macrinus demanded of him he was sure to perform. Whatever longings he might feel to return to home, he never discovered them; he never sought to gratify the tastes naturally peculiar to his age. The high priest and his colleagues were astonished at the extraordinary readiness with which the boy himself forwarded their intentions for him. Had they known how elaborately he had been prepared for his future employments at his father's house, they would have been less astonished at their pupil's unusual docility. Trained as he had been, he must have shown a more than human perversity had he displayed any opposition to his uncle's wishes. He had been permitted no childhood either of thought or action. His natural precocity had been seized as the engine to force his faculties into a perilous and unwholesome maturity; and when his new duties demanded his attention, he entered on them with the same sincerity of enthusiasm which his boyish coevals would have exhibited towards a new sport. His gradual initiation into the mysteries of his religion created a strange, voluptuous sensation of fear and interest in his mind. He heard the oracles, and he trembled; he attended the sacrifices and the auguries, and he wondered. All the poetry of the bold and beautiful superstition to which he was devoted flowed overwhelmingly into his young heart, absorbing the service of his fresh imagination, and transporting him incessantly from the vital realities of the outer world to the shadowy regions of aspiration and thought.

But his duties did not entirely occupy the attention of Ulpus. The boy had his peculiar pleasures as well as his peculiar occupations. When his employments were over for the day, it was a strange, unearthly, vital enjoyment to him to wander softly in the shade of the temple porticoes, looking down from his great mysterious eminence upon the populous and sun-brightened city at his feet; watching the brilliant expanse of the waters of the Nile glittering joyfully in the dazzling and pervading light; raising his eyes from the fields and woods, the palaces and garden, that stretched out before him below, to the lovely and cloudless sky that watched round him afar and above, and that awoke all that his new duties had left of the joyfulness, the affectionate sensibility, which his rare intervals of uninterrupted intercourse with his mother had implanted in his heart. Then, when the daylight began to wane, and the moon and stars already grew beautiful in their places in the firmament, he would pass into the subterranean vaults of the edifice, trembling as his little taper scarcely dispelled the dull, solemn gloom, and listening with breathless attention for the voices of those guardian spirits whose fabled habitation was made in the apartments of the sacred place. Or, when the multitude had departed for their amusements and their homes, he would steal into the lofty halls and wander round the pedestals of the mighty statues, breathing fearfully the still atmosphere of the temple, and watching the passage of the cold, melancholy moonbeams through the openings in the roof, and over the colossal limbs and features of the images of the pagan gods. Sometimes, when the services of Serapis and the cares attendant on his communications with the Emperor were concluded, Macrinus would lead his pupil into the garden of the priests, and praise him for his docility till his heart throbbed with gratitude and pride. Sometimes he would convey him cautiously outside the precincts of the sacred place, and show him, in the suburbs of the city, silent, pale, melancholy men, gliding suspiciously through the gay, crowded streets. Those fugitive figures, he would declare, were the enemies of the temple and all that it contained; conspirators against the Emperor and the gods; wretches who were to be driven forth as outcasts from humanity; whose appellation was 'Christian'; and whose impious worship, if tolerated, would deprive him of the uncle whom he loved, of the temple that he revered, and of the priestly dignity and renown which it should be his life's ambition to acquire.

Thus tutored in his duties by his guardian, and in his recreations by himself, as time wore on, the boy gradually lost every remaining characteristic of his age. Even the remembrance of his mother and his mother's love grew faint on his memory. Serious, solitary, thoughtful, he lived but to succeed in the temple; he laboured but to emulate the high

priest. All his feelings and faculties were now enslaved by an ambition, at once unnatural at his present age, and ominous of affliction for his future life. The design that Macrinus had contemplated as the work of years was perfected in a few months. The hope that his father had scarce dared to entertain for his manhood was already accomplished in his youth.

In these preparations for future success passed three years of the life of Ulpian. At the expiration of that period the death of Julian darkened the brilliant prospects of the Pagan world. Scarcely had the priests of Serapis recovered the first shock of astonishment and grief consequent upon the fatal news of the vacancy in the imperial throne, when the edict of toleration issued by Jovian, the new Emperor, reached the city of Alexandria, and was elevated on the walls of the temple.

The first sight of this proclamation (permitting freedom of worship to the Christians) aroused in the highly wrought disposition of Ulpian the most violent emotions of anger and contempt. The enthusiasm of his character and age, guided invariably in the one direction of his worship, took the character of the wildest fanaticism when he discovered the Emperor's careless infringement of the supremacy of the temple. He volunteered in the first moments of his fury to tear down the edict from the walls, to lead an attack on the meetings of the triumphant Christians, or to travel to the imperial abode and exhort Jovian to withdraw his act of perilous leniency ere it was too late. With difficulty did his more cautious confederates restrain him from the execution of his impetuous designs. For two days he withdrew himself from his companions, and brooded in solitude over the injury offered to his beloved superstition, and the prospective augmentation of the influence of the Christian sect.

But the despair of the young enthusiast was destined to be further augmented by a private calamity, at once mysterious in its cause and overwhelming in its effect. Two days after the publication of the edict the high priest Macrinus, in the prime of vigour and manhood, suddenly died.

To narrate the confusion and horror within and without the temple on the discovery of this fatal even; to describe the execrations and tumults of the priests and the populace, who at once suspected the favoured and ambitious Christians of causing, by poison, the death of their spiritual ruler, might be interesting as a history of the manners of the times, but is immaterial to the object of this chapter. We prefer rather to trace the effect on the mind of Ulpian of his personal and private bereavement; of this loss--irretrievable to him--of the master whom he loved and the guardian whom it was his privilege to revere.

An illness of some months, during the latter part of which his attendants trembled for his life and reason, sufficiently attested the sincerity of the grief of Ulpian for the loss of his protector. During his paroxysms of delirium the priests who watched round his bed drew from his ravings many wise conclusions as to the effects that his seizure and its causes were likely to produce on his future character; but, in spite of all their penetration, they were still far from appreciating to a tithe of its extent the revolution that his bereavement had wrought in his disposition. The boy himself, until the moment of the high priest's death, had never been aware of the depth of his devotion to his second father. Warped as they had been by his natural parent, the affectionate qualities that were the mainspring of his nature had never been entirely destroyed; and they seized on every kind word and gentle action of Macrinus as food which had been grudged them since their birth. Morally and intellectually, Macrinus had been to him the beacon that pointed the direction of his course, the judge that regulated his conduct, the Muse that he looked to for inspiration. And now, when this link which had connected every ramification of his most cherished and governing ideas was suddenly snapped asunder, a desolation sunk down upon his mind which at once paralysed its elasticity and withered its freshness. He glanced back, and saw nothing but a home from whose pleasures and affections his father's ambition had exiled him for ever. He looked forward, and as he thought of his unfitness, both from character and education, to mix in the world as others mixed in it, he saw no guiding star of social happiness for the conduct of his existence to come. There was now no resource left for him but entirely to deliver himself up to those pursuits which had made his home as a strange place to him, which were hallowed by their connection with the lost object of his attachment, and which would confer the sole happiness and distinction that he could hope for in the wide world on his future life.

In addition to this motive for labour in his vocation, there existed in the mind of Ulpian a deep and settled feeling that animated him with unceasing ardour for the prosecution of his cherished occupations. This governing principle was detestation of the Christian sect. The suspicion that others had entertained regarding the death of the high priest was to his mind a certainty. He rejected every idea which opposed his determined persuasion that the jealousy of the Christians had prompted them to the murder, by poison, of the most powerful and zealous of the Pagan priests. To labour incessantly until he attained the influence and position formerly enjoyed by his relative, and to use that influence and position, when once acquired, as the means of avenging Macrinus, by sweeping every vestige of the Christian faith from the face of the earth, were now the settled purposes of his heart.

Inspired by his determination with the deliberate wisdom which is in most men the result only of the experience of years, he employed the first days of his convalescence in cautiously maturing his future plans, and impartially calculating his chances of success. This self-examination completed, he devoted himself at once and for ever to his life's great design. Nothing wearied, nothing discouraged, nothing impeded him. Outward events passed by him unnoticed; the city's afflictions and the city's triumphs spoke no longer to his heart. Year succeeded to year, but Time had no tongue for him. Paganism gradually sank, and Christianity imperceptibly rose, but change spread no picture before his eyes. The whole outward world was a void to him, until the moment arrived that beheld him successful in his designs. His preparations for the future absorbed every faculty of his nature, and left him, as to the present, a mere automaton, reflecting no principle, and animated by no event--a machine that moved, but did not perceive--a body that acted, without a mind that thought.

Returning for a moment to the outward world, we find that on the death of Jovian, in 364, Valentinian, the new Emperor, continued the system of toleration adopted by his predecessor. On his death, in 375, Gratian, the successor to the imperial throne, so far improved on the example of the two former potentates as to range himself boldly on the side of the partisans of the new faith. Not content with merely encouraging, both by precept and by example, the growth of Christianity, the Emperor further testified to his zeal for the rising religion by inflicting incessant persecutions upon the rapidly decreasing advocates of the ancient worship; serving, by these acts of his reign, as pioneer to his successor, Theodosius the Great, in the religious revolution which that illustrious opponent of Paganism was destined to effect.

The death of Gratian, in 383, saw Ulpian enrolled among the chief priests of the temple, and pointed out as the next inheritor of the important office once held by the powerful and active Macrinus. Beholding himself thus secure of the distinction for which he had laboured, the aspiring priest found leisure, at length, to look forth upon the affairs of the passing day. From every side desolation darkened the prospect that he beheld. Already, throughout many provinces of the Empire, the temples of the gods had been overthrown by the destructive zeal of the triumphant Christians. Already hosts of the terrified people, fearing that the fate of their idols might ultimately be their own, finding themselves deserted by their disbanded priests, and surrounded by the implacable enemies of the ancient faith, had renounced their worship for the sake of saving their lives and securing their property. On the wide field of Pagan ruin there now rose but one structure entirely unimpaired. The Temple of Serapis still reared its head--unshaken, unbending, unpolluted.

Here the sacrifice still prospered and the people still bowed in worship. Before this monument of the religious glories of ages, even the rising power of Christian supremacy quailed in dismay. Though the ranks of its once multitudinous congregations were now perceptibly thinned, though the new churches swarmed with converts, though the edicts from Rome denounced it as a blot on the face of the earth, its gloomy and solitary grandeur was still preserved. No unhallowed foot trod its secret recesses; no destroying hand was raised as yet against its ancient and glorious walls.

Indignation, but not despondency, filled the heart of Ulpus as he surveyed the situation of the Pagan world. A determination nourished as his had been by the reflections of years, and matured by incessant industry of deliberation, is above all those shocks which affect a hasty decision or destroy a wavering intention. Impervious to failure, disasters urge it into action, but never depress it to repose. Its existence is the air that preserves the vitality of the mind--the spring that moves the action of the thoughts. Never for a moment did Ulpus waver in his devotion to his great design, or despair of its ultimate execution and success. Though every succeeding day brought the news of fresh misfortunes for the Pagans and fresh triumphs for the Christians, still, with a few of his more zealous comrades, he persisted in expecting the advent of another Julian, and a day of restoration for the dismantled shrines of the deities that he served. While the Temple of Serapis stood uninjured, to give encouragement to his labours and refuge to his persecuted brethren, there existed for him such an earnest of success as would spur him to any exertion, and nerve him against any peril.

And now, to the astonishment of priests and congregations, the silent, thoughtful, solitary Ulpus suddenly started from his long repose, and stood forth the fiery advocate of the rights of his invaded worship. In a few days the fame of his addresses to the Pagans who still attended the rites of Serapis spread throughout the whole city. The boldest among the Christians, as they passed the temple walls, involuntarily trembled when they heard the vehemence of the applause which arose from the audience of the inspired priest. Addressed to all varieties of age and character, these harangues woke an echo in every breast they reached. To the young they were clothed in all the poetry of the worship for which they pleaded. They dwelt on the altars of Venus that the Christians would lay waste; on the woodlands that the Christians would disenchant of their Dryads; on the hallowed Arts that the Christians would arise and destroy. To the aged they called up remembrances of the glories of the past achieved through the favour of the gods; of ancestors who had died in their service; of old forgotten loves, and joys, and successes that had grown and prospered under the gentle guardianship of the deities of old--while the unvarying



burden of their conclusion to all was the reiterated assertion that the illustrious Macrinus had died a victim to the toleration of the Christian sect.

But the efforts of Ulpus were not confined to the delivery of orations. Every moment of his leisure time was dedicated to secret pilgrimages into Alexandria. Careless of peril, regardless of threats, the undaunted enthusiast penetrated into the most private meeting-places of the Christians; reclaiming on every side apostates to the Pagan creed, and defying the hostility of half the city from the stronghold of the temple walls. Day after day fresh recruits arrived to swell the ranks of the worshippers of Serapis. The few members of the scattered congregations of the provinces who still remained faithful to the ancient worship were gathered together in Alexandria by the private messengers of the unwearied Ulpus. Already tumults began to take place between the Pagans and the Christians; and even now the priest of Serapis prepared to address a protest to the new Emperor in behalf of the ancient religion of the land. At this moment it seemed probable that the heroic attempts of one man to prop the structure of superstition, whose foundations were undermined throughout, and whose walls were attacked by brigands, might actually be crowned with success.

But Time rolled on; and with him came inexorable change, trampling over the little barriers set up against it by human opposition, and erecting its strange and transitory fabrics triumphantly in their stead. In vain did the devoted priest exert all his powers to augment and combine his scattered band; in vain did the mighty temple display its ancient majesty, its gorgeous sacrifices, its mysterious auguries. The spirit of Christianity was forth for triumph on the earth--the last destinies of Paganism were fast accomplishing. Yet a few seasons more of unavailing resistance passed by, and then the Archbishop of Alexandria issued his decree that the Temple of Serapis should be destroyed.

At the rumour of their Primate's determination, the Christian fanatics rose by swarms from every corner of Egypt, and hurried into Alexandria to be present at the work of demolition. From the arid solitudes of the desert, from their convents on rocks and their caverns in the earth, hosts of rejoicing monks flew to the city gates, and ranged themselves with the soldiery and the citizens, impatient for the assault. At the dawn of morning this assembly of destroyers was convened, and as the sun rose over Alexandria they arrived before the temple walls.

The gates of the glorious structure were barred; the walls were crowded with their Pagan defenders. A still, dead, mysterious silence reigned over the whole edifice; and, of all the men who thronged it, one only moved from his

appointed place--one only wandered incessantly from point to point, wherever the building was open to assault. Those among the besiegers who were nearest the temple saw in this presiding genius of the preparations for defence the object at once of their most malignant hatred and their most ungovernable dread--Ulpus the priest.

As soon as the Archbishop gave the signal for the assault, a band of monks--their harsh, discordant voices screaming fragments of psalms, their tattered garments waving in the air, their cadaverous faces gleaming with ferocious joy--led the way, placed the first ladders against the walls, and began the attack. From all sides the temple was assailed by the infuriated besiegers, and on all sides it was successfully defended by the resolute besieged. Shock after shock fell upon the massive gates without forcing them to recede; missile after missile was hurled at the building, but no breach was made in its solid surface. Multitudes scaled the walls, gained the outer porticoes, and slaughtered their Pagan defenders, but were incessantly repulsed in their turn ere they could make their advantage good. Over and over again did the assailants seem on the point of storming the temple successfully, but the figure of Ulpus, invariably appearing at the critical moment among his disheartened followers, acted like a fatality in destroying the effect of the most daring exertions and the most important triumphs. Wherever there was danger, wherever there was carnage, wherever there was despair, thither strode the undaunted priest, inspiring the bold, succouring the wounded, reanimating the feeble. Blinded by no stratagem, wearied by no fatigue, there was something almost demoniac in his activity for destruction, in his determination under defeat. The besiegers marked his course round the temple by the calamities that befell them at his every step. If the bodies of slaughtered Christians were flung down upon them from the walls, they felt that Ulpus was there. If the bravest of the soldiery hesitated at mounting the ladders, it was known that Ulpus was directing the defeat of their comrades above. If a sally from the temple drove back the advanced guard upon the reserves in the rear, it was pleaded as their excuse that Ulpus was fighting at the head of his Pagan bands. Crowd on crowd of Christian warriors still pressed forward to the attack; but though the ranks of the unbelievers were perceptibly thinned, though the gates that defended them at last began to quiver before the reiterated blows by which they were assailed, every court of the sacred edifice yet remained in the possession of the besieged, and was at the disposal of the unconquered captain who organised the defence.

Depressed by the failure of his efforts, and horrified at the carnage already perpetrated among his adherents, the Archbishop suddenly commanded a cessation of hostilities, and proposed to the defenders of the temple a short

and favourable truce. After some delay, and apparently at the expense of some discord among their ranks, the Pagans sent to the Primate an assurance of their acceptance of his terms, which were that both parties should abstain from any further struggle for the ascendancy until an edict from Theodosius determining the ultimate fate of the temple should be applied for and obtained.

The truce once agreed on, the wide space before the respited edifice was gradually cleared of its occupants. Slowly and sadly the Archbishop and his followers departed from the ancient walls whose summits they had assaulted in vain; and when the sun went down, of the great multitude congregated in the morning a few corpses were all that remained. Within the sacred building, Death and Repose ruled with the night, where morning had brightly glittered on Life and Action. The wounded, the wearied, and the cold, all now lay hushed alike, fanned by the night breezes that wandered through the lofty porticoes, or soothed by the obscurity that reigned over the silent halls. Among the ranks of the Pagan devotees but one man still toiled and thought. Round and round the temple, restless as a wild beast that is threatened in his lair, watchful as a lonely spirit in a city of strange tombs, wandered the solitary and brooding Ulpius. For him there was no rest of body--no tranquility of mind. On the events of the next few days hovered the fearful chance that was soon, either for misery or happiness, to influence irretrievably the years of his future life. Round and round the mighty walls he watched with mechanical and useless anxiety. Every stone in the building was eloquent to his lonely heart--beautiful to his wild imagination. On those barren structures stretched for him the loved and fertile home; there was the shrine for whose glory his intellect had been enslaved, for whose honour his youth had been sacrificed! Round and round the secret recesses and sacred courts he paced with hurried footstep, cleansing with gentle and industrious hand the stains of blood and the defilements of warfare from the statues at his side. Sad, solitary, thoughtful, as in the first days of his apprenticeship to the gods, he now roved in the same moonlit recesses where Macrinus had taught him in his youth. As the menacing tumults of the day had aroused his fierceness, so the stillness of the quiet night awakened his gentleness. He had combated for the temple in the morning as a son for a parent, and he now watched over it at night as a miser over his treasure, as a lover over his mistress, as a mother over her child!

The days passed on; and at length the memorable morning arrived which was to determine the fate of the last temple that Christian fanaticism had spared to the admiration of the world. At an early hour of the morning the diminished numbers of the Pagan zealots met their reinforced and

determined opponents--both sides being alike unarmed--in the great square of Alexandria. The imperial prescript was then publicly read. It began by assuring the Pagans that their priest's plea for protection for the temple had received the same consideration which had been bestowed on the petition against the gods presented by the Christian Archbishop, and ended by proclaiming the commands of the Emperor that Serapis and all other idols in Alexandria should immediately be destroyed.

The shout of triumph which followed the conclusion of the imperial edict still rose from the Christian ranks when the advanced guard of the soldiers appointed to ensure the execution of the Emperor's designs appeared in the square. For a few minutes the forsaken Pagans stood rooted to the spot where they had assembled, gazing at the warlike preparations around them in a stupor of bewilderment and despair. Then as they recollected how diminished were their numbers, how arduous had been their first defence against a few, and how impossible would be a second defence against many--from the boldest to the feeblest, a panic seized on them; and, regardless of Ulpian, regardless of honour, regardless of the gods, they turned with one accord and fled from the place.

With the flight of the Pagans the work of demolition began. Even women and children hurried to join in the welcome task of indiscriminate destruction. No defenders on this occasion barred the gates of the temple to the Christian hosts. The sublime solitude of the tenantless building was outraged and invaded in an instant. Statues were broken, gold was carried off, doors were splintered into fragments; but here for a while the progress of demolition was delayed. Those to whom the labour of ruining the outward structure had been confided were less successful than their neighbours who had pillaged its contents. The ponderous stones of the pillars, the massive surfaces of the walls, resisted the most vigorous of their puny efforts, and forced them to remain contented with mutilating that which they could not destroy--with tearing off roofs, defacing marbles, and demolishing capitals. The rest of the buildings remained uninjured, and grander even now in the wildness of ruin than ever it had been in the stateliness of perfection and strength.

But the most important achievement still remained, the death-wound of Paganism was yet to be struck--the idol Serapis, which had ruled the hearts of millions, and was renowned in the remotest corners of the Empire, was to be destroyed! A breathless silence pervaded the Christian ranks as they filled the hall of the god. A superstitious dread, to which they had hitherto thought themselves superior, overcame their hearts, as a single soldier, bolder than his fellows, mounted by a ladder to the head of the colossal

statue, and struck at its cheek with an axe. The blow had scarcely been dealt when a deep groan was heard from the opposite wall of the apartment, succeeded by a noise of retreating footsteps, and then all was silent again. For a few minutes this incident stayed the feet of those who were about to join their companion in the mutilation of the idol; but after an interval their hesitation vanished, they dealt blow after blow at the statue, and no more groans followed--no more sounds were heard, save the wild echoes of the stroke of hammer, crowbar, and club, resounding through the lofty hall. In an incredibly short space of time the image of Serapis lay in great fragments on the marble floor. The multitude seized on the limbs of the idol and ran forth to drag them in triumph through the streets. Yet a few minutes more, and the ruins were untenanted, the temple was silent--Paganism was destroyed!

Throughout the ravaging course of the Christians over the temple, they had been followed with dogged perseverance, and at the same time with the most perfect impunity, by the only Pagan of all his brethren who had not sought safety by flight. This man, being acquainted with every private passage and staircase in the sacred building, was enabled to be secretly present at each fresh act of demolition, in whatever part of the edifice it might be perpetrated. From hall to hall, and from room to room, he tracked with noiseless step and glaring eye the movements of the Christian mob--now hiding himself behind a pillar, now passing into concealed cavities in the walls, now looking down from imperceptible fissures in the roof; but, whatever his situation, invariably watching from it, with the same industry of attention and the same silence of emotion, the minutest acts of spoliation committed by the most humble follower of the Christian ranks. It was only when he entered with the victorious ravagers into the vast apartment occupied by the idol Serapis that the man's countenance began to give evidence of the agony under which his heart was writhing within him. He mounted a private staircase cut in the hollow of the massive wall of the room, and gaining a passage that ran round the extremities of the ceiling, looked through a sort of lattice concealed in the ornaments of the cornice. As he gazed down and saw the soldier mounting, axe in hand, to the idol's head, great drops of perspiration trickled from his forehead. His hot, thick breath hissed through his closed teeth, and his hands strained at the strong metal supports of the lattice until they bent beneath his grasp. When the stroke descended on the image, he closed his eyes. When the fragment detached by the blow fell on the floor, a groan burst from his quivering lips. For one moment more he glared down with a gaze of horror upon the multitude at his feet, and then with frantic speed he descended the steep stairs by which he had mounted to the roof, and fled from the temple.

The same night this man was again seen by some shepherds whom curiosity led to visit the desecrated building, weeping bitterly in its ruined and deserted porticoes. As they approached to address him, he raised his head, and with a supplicating action signed to them to leave the place. For the few moments during which he confronted them, the moonlight shone full upon his countenance, and the shepherds, who had in former days attended the ceremonies of the temple, saw with astonishment that the solitary mourner whose meditations they had disturbed was no other than Ulpus the priest.

At the dawn of day these shepherds had again occasion to pass the walls of the pillaged temple. Throughout the hours of the night the remembrance of the scene of unsoled, unpartaken grief that they had beheld--of the awful loneliness of misery in which they had seen the heart-broken and forsaken man, whose lightest words they had once delighted to revere--inspired them with a feeling of pity for the deserted Pagan, widely at variance with the spirit of persecution which the spurious Christianity of their day would fain have instilled in the bosoms of its humblest votaries. Bent on consolation, anxious to afford help, these men, like the Samaritan of old, went up at their own peril to succour a brother in affliction. They searched every portion of the empty building, but the object of their sympathy was nowhere to be seen. They called, but heard no answering sound, save the dirging of the winds of early morning through the ruined halls, which but a short time since had resounded with the eloquence of the once illustrious priest. Except a few night-birds, already sheltered by the deserted edifice, not a living being moved in what was once the temple of the Eastern world. Ulpus was gone.

These events took place in the year 389. In 390, Pagan ceremonies were made treason by the laws throughout the whole Roman Empire.

From that period the scattered few who still adhered to the ancient faith became divided into three parties; each alike insignificant, whether considered as openly or secretly inimical to the new religion of the State at large.

The first party unsuccessfully endeavoured to elude the laws prohibitory of sacrifices and divinations by concealing their religious ceremonies under the form of convivial meetings.

The second preserved their ancient respect for the theory of Paganism, but abandoned all hope and intention of ever again accomplishing its practice. By such timely concessions many were enabled to preserve--and some even

to attain--high and lucrative employments as officers of the State.

The third retired to their homes, the voluntary exiles of every religion; resigning the practice of their old worship as a necessity, and shunning the communion of Christians as a matter of choice.

Such were the unimportant divisions into which the last remnants of the once powerful Pagan community now subsided; but to none of them was the ruined and degraded Ulpian ever attached.

For five weary years--dating from the epoch of the prohibition of Paganism--he wandered through the Empire, visiting in every country the ruined shrines of his deserted worship--a friendless, hopeless, solitary man!

Throughout the whole of Europe, and all of Asia and the East that still belonged to Rome, he bent his slow and toilsome course. In the fertile valleys of Gaul, over the burning sands of Africa, through the sun-bright cities of Spain, he travelled--unfriended as a man under a curse, lonely as a second Cain. Never for an instant did the remembrance of his ruined projects desert his memory, or his mad determination to revive his worship abandon his mind. At every relic of Paganism, however slight, that he encountered on his way, he found a nourishment for his fierce anguish, and employment for his vengeful thoughts. Often, in the little villages, children were frightened from their sports in a deserted temple by the apparition of his gaunt, rigid figure among the tottering pillars, or the sound of his hollow voice as he muttered to himself among the ruins of the Pagan tombs. Often, in crowded cities, groups of men, congregated to talk over the fall of Paganism, found him listening at their sides, and comforting them, when they carelessly regretted their ancient faith, with a smiling and whispered assurance that a time of restitution would yet come. By all opinions and in all places he was regarded as a harmless madman, whose strange delusions and predilections were not to be combated, but to be indulged. Thus he wandered through the Christian world; regardless alike of lapse of time and change of climate; living within himself; mourning, as a luxury, over the fall of his worship; patient of wrongs, insults, and disappointments; watching for the opportunity that he still persisted in believing was yet to arrive; holding by his fatal determination with all the recklessness of ambition and all the perseverance of revenge.

The five years passed away unheeded, uncalculated, unregretted by Ulpian. For him, living but in the past, hoping but for the future, space held no obstacles--time was an oblivion. Years pass as days, hours as moments, when the varying emotions which mark their existence on the memory, and

distinguish their succession on the dial of the heart, exist no longer either for happiness or woe. Dead to all freshness of feeling, the mind of Ulpus, during the whole term of his wanderings, lay numbed beneath the one idea that possessed it. It was only at the expiration of those unheeded years, when the chances of travel turned his footsteps towards Alexandria, that his faculties burst from the long bondage which had oppressed them. Then--when he passed through those gates which he had entered in former years a proud, ambitious boy, when he walked ungreeted through the ruined temple where he had once lived illustrious and revered--his dull, cold thoughts arose strong and vital within him. The spectacle of the scene of his former glories, which might have awakened despair in others, aroused the dormant passions, emancipated the stifled energies in him. The projects of vengeance and the visions of restoration which he had brooded over for five long years, now rose before him as realised already under the vivid influence of the desecrated scenes around. As he stood beneath the shattered porticoes of the sacred place, not a stone crumbling at his feet but rebuked him for his past inaction, and strengthened him for daring, for conspiracy, for revenge, in the service of the outraged gods. The ruined temples he had visited in his gloomy pilgrimages now became revived by his fancy, as one by one they rose on his toiling memory. Broken pillars soared from the ground; desecrated idols reoccupied their vacant pedestals; and he, the exile and the mourner, stood forth once again the ruler, the teacher, and the priest. The time of restitution was come; though his understanding supplied him with no distinct projects, his heart urged him to rush blindly on the execution of his reform. The moment had arrived--Macrinus should yet be avenged; the temple should at last be restored.

He descended into the city; he hurried--neither welcomed nor recognised--through the crowded streets; he entered the house of a man who had once been his friend and colleague in the days that were past, and poured forth to him his wild determinations and disjointed plans, entreating his assistance, and promising him a glorious success. But his old companion had become, by a timely conversion to Christianity, a man of property and reputation in Alexandria, and he turned from the friendless enthusiast with indignation and contempt. Repulsed, but not disheartened, Ulpus sought others who he had known in his prosperity and renown. They had all renounced their ancient worship--they all received him with studied coldness or careless disdain; but he still persisted in his useless efforts. He blinded his eyes to their contemptuous looks; he shut his ears to their derisive words. Persevering in his self-delusion, he appointed them messengers to their brethren in other countries, captains of the conspiracy that was to commence in Alexandria, orators before the people when the memorable revolution had once begun. It was in vain that they refused all participation



in his designs; he left them as the expressions of refusal rose to their lips, and hurried elsewhere, as industrious in his efforts, as devoted to his unwelcome mission, as if half the population of the city had vowed themselves joyfully to aid him in his frantic attempt.

Thus during the whole day he continued his labour of useless persuasion among those in the city who had once been his friends. When the evening came, he repaired, weary but not despondent, to the earthly paradise that he was determined to regain--to the temple where he had once taught, and where he still imagined that he was again destined to preside. Here he proceeded, ignorant of the new laws, careless of discovery and danger, to ascertain by divination, as in the days of old, whether failure or success awaited him ultimately in his great design.

Meanwhile the friends whose assistance Ulpus had determined to extort were far from remaining inactive on their parts after the departure of the aspiring priest. They remembered with terror that the laws affected as severely those concealing their knowledge of a Pagan intrigue as those actually engaged in directing a Pagan conspiracy; and their anxiety for their personal safety overcoming every consideration of the dues of honour or the claims of ancient friendship, they repaired in a body to the Prefect of the city, and informed him, with all the eagerness of apprehension, of the presence of Ulpus in Alexandria, and of the culpability of the schemes that he had proposed.

A search after the devoted Pagan was immediately commenced. He was found the same night before a ruined altar, brooding over the entrails of an animal that he had just sacrificed. Further proof of his guilt could not be required. He was taken prisoner; led forth the next morning to be judged, amid the execrations of the very people who had almost adored him once; and condemned the following day to suffer the penalty of death.

At the appointed hour the populace assembled to behold the execution. To their indignation and disappointment, however, when the officers of the city appeared before the prison, it was only to inform the spectators that the performance of the fatal ceremony had been adjourned. After a mysterious delay of some weeks, they were again convened, not to witness the execution, but to receive the extraordinary announcement that the culprit's life had been spared, and that his amended sentence now condemned him to labour as a slave for life in the copper-mines of Spain.

What powerful influence induced the Prefect to risk the odium of reprieving a prisoner whose guilt was so satisfactorily ascertained as that of Ulpus

never was disclosed. Some declared that the city magistrate was still at heart a Pagan, and that he consequently shrunk from authorising the death of a man who had once been the most illustrious among the professors of the ancient creed. Others reported that Ulpus had secured the leniency of his judges by acquainting them with the position of one of those secret repositories of enormous treasure supposed to exist beneath the foundations of the dismantled Temple of Serapis. But the truth of either of these rumours could never be satisfactorily proved. Nothing more was accurately discovered than that Ulpus was removed from Alexandria to the place of earthly torment set apart for him by the zealous authorities, at the dead of night; and that the sentry at the gate through which he departed heard him mutter to himself, as he was hurried onward, that his divinations had prepared him for defeat, but that the great day of Pagan restoration would yet arrive.

In the year 407, twelve years after the events above narrated, Ulpus entered the city of Rome.

He had not advanced far, before the gaiety and confusion in the streets appeared completely to bewilder him. He hastened to the nearest public garden that he could perceive, and avoiding the frequented paths, flung himself down, apparently fainting with exhaustion, at the foot of a tree.

For some time he lay on the shady resting-place which he had chosen, gasping painfully for breath, his frame ever and anon shaken to its centre by sudden spasms, and his lips quivering with an agitation which he vainly endeavoured to suppress. So changed was his aspect, that the guards who had removed him from Alexandria, wretched as was his appearance even then, would have found it impossible to recognise him now as the same man whom they had formerly abandoned to slavery in the mines of Spain. The effluvia exhaled from the copper ore in which he had been buried for twelve years had not only withered the flesh upon his bones, but had imparted to its surface a livid hue, almost death-like in its dulness. His limbs, wasted by age and distorted by suffering, bent and trembled beneath him; and his form, once so majestic in its noble proportions, was now so crooked and misshapen, that whoever beheld him could only have imagined that he must have been deformed from his birth. Of the former man no characteristic remained but the expression of the stern, mournful eyes; and these, the truthful interpreters of the indomitable mind whose emotions they seemed created to express, preserved, unaltered by suffering and unimpaired by time, the same look, partly of reflection, partly of defiance, and partly of despair, which had marked them in those past days when the temple was destroyed and the congregations of the Pagans dispersed.

But the repose at this moment demanded by his worn-out body was even yet denied to it by his untamed, unwearied mind, and, as the voice of his old delusion spoke within him again, the devoted priest rose from his solitary resting-place, and looked forth upon the great city, whose new worship he was vowed to overthrow.

'By years of patient watchfulness,' he whispered to himself, 'have I succeeded in escaping successfully from my dungeon among the mines. Yet a little more cunning, a little more endurance, a little more vigilance, and I shall still live to people, by my own exertions, the deserted temples of Rome.'

As he spoke he emerged from the grove into the street. The joyous sunlight--a stranger to him for years--shone warmly down upon his face, as if to welcome him to liberty and the world. The sounds of gay laughter rang in his ears, as if to woo him back to the blest enjoyments and amenities of life; but Nature's influence and man's example were now silent alike to his lonely heart. Over its dreary wastes still reigned the ruthless ambition which had exiled love from his youth, and friendship from his manhood, and which was destined to end its mission of destruction by banishing tranquility from his age. Scowling fiercely at all around and above him, he sought the loneliest and shadiest streets. Solitude had now become a necessity to his heart. The 'great gulph' of his unshared aspirations had long since socially separated him for ever from his fellow-men. He thought, laboured, and suffered for himself alone.

To describe the years of unrewarded labour and unalleviated hardship endured by Ulpian in the place of his punishment; to dwell on the day that brought with it--whatever the season in the world above--the same unwearied inheritance of exertion and fatigue; to chronicle the history of night after night of broken slumber one hour, of wearying thought the next, would be to produce a picture from the mournful monotony of which the attention of the reader would recoil with disgust. It will be here sufficient to observe, that the influence of the same infatuation which had nerved him to the defence of the assaulted temple, and encouraged him to attempt his ill-planned restoration of Paganism, had preserved him through sufferings under which stronger and younger men would have sunk for ever; had prompted his determination to escape from his slavery, and had now brought him to Rome--old, forsaken, and feeble as he was--to risk new perils and suffer new afflictions for the cause to which, body and soul, he had ruthlessly devoted himself for ever.

Urged, therefore, by his miserable delusion, he had now entered a city

where even his name was unknown, faithful to his frantic project of opposing himself, as a helpless, solitary man, against the people and government of an Empire. During his term of slavery, regardless of his advanced years, he had arranged a series of projects, the gradual execution of which would have demanded the advantages of a long and vigorous life. He no more desired, as in his former attempt at Alexandria, to precipitate at all hazards the success of his designs. He was now prepared to watch, wait, plot, and contrive for years on years; he was resigned to be contented with the poorest and slowest advancement--to be encouraged by the smallest prospect of ultimate triumph. Acting under this determination, he started his project by devoting all that remained of his enfeebled energies to cautiously informing himself, by every means in his power, of the private, political, and religious sentiments of all men of influence in Rome. Wherever there was a popular assemblage, he attended it to gather the scandalous gossip of the day; wherever there was a chance of overhearing a private conversation, he contrived to listen to it unobserved. About the doors of taverns and the haunts of discharged servants he lurked noiseless as a shadow, attentive alike to the careless revelations of intoxication or the scurrility of malignant slaves. Day after day passed on, and still saw him devoted to his occupation (which, servile as it was in itself, was to his eyes ennobled by its lofty end), until at the expiration of some months he found himself in possession of a vague and inaccurate fund of information, which he stored up as a priceless treasure in his mind. He next discovered the name and abode of every nobleman in Rome suspected even of the most careless attachment to the ancient form of worship. He attended Christian churches, mastered the intricacies of different sects, and estimated the importance of contending schisms; gaining this collection of heterogeneous facts under the combined disadvantages of poverty, solitude, and age; dependent for support on the poorest public charities, and for shelter on the meanest public asylums. Every conclusion that he drew from all he learned partook of the sanguine character of the fatal self-deception which had embittered his whole life. He believed that the dissensions which he saw raging in the Church would speedily effect the destruction of Christianity itself; that, when such a period should arrive, the public mind would require but the guidance of some superior intellect to return to its old religious predilections; and that to lay the foundation for effecting in such a manner the desired revolution, it was necessary for him--impossible though it might seem in his present degraded condition--to gain access to the disaffected nobles of Rome, and discover the secret of acquiring such an influence over them as would enable him to infect them with his enthusiasm, and fire them with his determination. Greater difficulties even than these had been overcome by other men. Solitary individuals had, ere this, originated revolutions. The gods would favour him; his own cunning would protect

him. Yet a little more patience, a little more determination, and he might still, after all his misfortunes, be assured of success.

It was about this period that he first heard, while pursuing his investigations, of an obscure man who had suddenly arisen to undertake a reformation in the Christian Church, whose declared aim was to rescue the new worship from that very degeneracy on the fatal progress of which rested all his hopes of triumph. It was reported that this man had been for some time devoted to his reforming labours, but that the difficulties attendant on the task that he had appointed for himself had hitherto prevented him from attaining all the notoriety essential to the satisfactory prosecution of his plans. On hearing this rumour, Ulpian immediately joined the few who attended the new orator's discourses, and there heard enough to convince him that he listened to the most determined zealot for Christianity in the city of Rome. To gain this man's confidence, to frustrate every effort that he might make in his new vocation, to ruin his credit with his hearers, and to threaten his personal safety by betraying his inmost secrets to his powerful enemies in the Church, were determinations instantly adopted by the Pagan as duties demanded by the exigencies of his creed. From that moment he seized every opportunity of favourably attracting the new reformer's attention to himself, and, as the reader already knows, he was at length rewarded for his cunning and perseverance by being received into the household of the charitable and unsuspecting Numerian as a pious convert to the Christianity of the early Church.

Once installed under Numerian's roof, the treacherous Pagan saw in the Christian's daughter an instrument admirably adapted, in his unscrupulous hands, for forwarding his wild project of obtaining the ear of a Roman of power and station who was disaffected to the established worship. Among the patricians of whose anti-Christian predilections report had informed him, was Numerian's neighbour, Vetricius the senator. To such a man, renowned for his life of luxury, a girl so beautiful as Antonina would be a bribe rich enough to enable him to extort any promise required as a reward for betraying her while under the protection of her father's house. In addition to this advantage to be drawn from her ruin, was the certainty that her loss would so affect Numerian as to render him, for a time at least, incapable of pursuing his labours in the cause of Christianity. Fixed then in his detestable purpose, the ruthless priest patiently awaited the opportunity of commencing his machinations. Nor did he watch in vain. The victim innocently fell into the very trap that he had prepared for her when she first listened to the music of Vetricius's lute, and permitted her treacherous guardian to become the friend who concealed her disobedience from her father's ear. After that first fatal step every day brought the projects of

Ulpian nearer to success. The long-sought interview with the senator was at length obtained; the engagement imperatively demanded on the one side was, as we have already related, carelessly accepted on the other; the day that was to bring success to the schemes of the betrayer, and degradation to the honour of the betrayed, was appointed; and once more the cold heart of the fanatic warmed to the touch of joy. No doubts upon the validity of his engagement with Vetrician ever entered his mind. He never imagined that powerful senator could with perfect impunity deny him the impracticable assistance he had demanded as his reward, and thrust him as an ignorant madman from his palace gates. Firmly and sincerely he believed that Vetrician was so satisfied with his readiness in pandering to his profligate designs, and so dazzled by the prospect of the glory which would attend success in the great enterprise, that he would gladly hold to the performance of his promise whenever it should be required of him. In the meantime the work was begun. Numerian was already, through his agency, watched by the spies of a jealous and unscrupulous Church. Feuds, schisms, treacheries, and dissensions marched bravely onward through the Christian ranks. All things combined to make it certain that the time was near at hand when, through his exertions and the friendly senator's help, the restoration of Paganism might be assured.

With the widest diversity of pursuit and difference of design, there was still a strange and mysterious analogy between the temporary positions of Ulpian and Numerian. One was prepared to be a martyr for the temple; the other to be a martyr for the Church. Both were enthusiasts in an unwelcome cause; both had suffered more than a life's wonted share of affliction; and both were old, passing irretrievably from their fading present on earth to the eternal future awaiting them in the unknown spheres beyond.

But here--with their position--the comparison between them ends. The Christian's principle of action, drawn from the Divinity he served, was love; the Pagan's, born of the superstition that was destroying him, was hate. The one laboured for mankind; the other for himself. And thus the aspirations of Numerian, founded on the general good, nourished by offices of kindness, and nobly directed to a generous end, might lead him into indiscretion, but could never degrade him into crime--might trouble the serenity of his life, but could never deprive him of the consolation of hope. While, on the contrary, the ambition of Ulpian, originating in revenge and directed to destruction, exacted cruelty from his heart and duplicity from his mind; and, as the reward for his service, mocked him alternately throughout his whole life with delusion and despair.