

CHAPTER 22 - THE BANQUET OF FAMINE

Of all prophecies, none are, perhaps, so frequently erroneous as those on which we are most apt to venture in endeavouring to foretell the effect of outward events on the characters of men. In no form of our anticipations are we more frequently baffled than in such attempts to estimate beforehand the influence of circumstance over conduct, not only in others, but also even in ourselves. Let the event but happen, and men, whom we view by the light of our previous observation of them, act under it as the living contradictions of their own characters. The friend of our daily social intercourse, in the progress of life, and the favourite hero of our historic studies, in the progress of the page, astonish, exceed, or disappoint our expectations alike. We find it as vain to foresee a cause as to fix a limit for the arbitrary inconsistencies in the dispositions of mankind.

But, though to speculate upon the future conduct of others under impending circumstances be but too often to expose the fallacy of our wisest anticipations, to contemplate the nature of that conduct after it has been displayed is a useful subject of curiosity, and may perhaps be made a fruitful source of instruction. Similar events which succeed each other at different periods are relieved from monotony, and derive new importance from the ever-varying effects which they produce on the human character. Thus, in the great occurrence which forms the foundation of our narrative, we may find little in the siege of Rome, looking at it as a mere event, to distinguish it remarkably from any former siege of the city--the same desire for glory and vengeance, wealth and dominion, which brought Alaric to her walls, brought other invaders before him. But if we observed the effect of the Gothic descent upon Italy on the inhabitants of her capital, we shall find ample matter for novel contemplation and unbounded surprise.

We shall perceive, as an astonishing instance of the inconsistencies of the human character, the spectacle of a whole people resolutely defying an overwhelming foreign invasion at their very doors, just at the period when they had fallen most irremediably from the highest position of national glory to the lowest depths of national degradation; resisting an all-powerful enemy with inflexible obstinacy, for the honour of the Roman name, which they had basely dishonoured or carelessly forgotten for ages past. We shall behold men who have hitherto laughed at the very name of patriotism, now starving resolutely in their country's cause; who stopped at no villainy to obtain wealth, now hesitating to employ their ill-gotten gains in the purchase of the most important of all gratifications--their own security and peace. Instances of the unimaginable effect produced by the event of the siege of Rome on the characters of her inhabitants might be drawn from all classes, from the

lowest to the highest, from patrician to plebeian; but to produce them here would be to admit too long an interruption in the progress of the present narrative. If we are to enter at all into detail on such a subject, it must be only in a case clearly connected with the actual requirements of our story; and such a case may be found, at this juncture, in the conduct of the senator Vetricio, under the influence of the worst calamities attending the blockade of Rome by the Goths.

Who, it may be asked, knowing the previous character of this man, his frivolity of disposition, his voluptuous anxiety for unremitting enjoyment and ease, his horror of the slightest approaches of affliction or pain, would have imagined him capable of rejecting in disdain all the minor chances of present security and future prosperity which his unbounded power and wealth might have procured for him, even in a famine-stricken city, and rising suddenly to the sublime of criminal desperation, in the resolution to abandon life as worthless the moment it had ceased to run in the easy current of all former years? Yet to this determination had he now arrived; and, still more extraordinary, in this determination had he found others, of his own patrician order, to join him.

The reader will remember his wild announcement of his intended orgie to the Prefect Pompeianus during the earlier periods of the siege; that announcement was now to be fulfilled. Vetricio had bidden his guests to the Banquet of Famine. A chosen number of the senators of the great city were to vindicate their daring by dying the revellers that they had lived; by resigning in contempt all prospect of starving, like the common herd, on a lessening daily pittance of loathsome food; by making their triumphant exit from a fettered and ungrateful life, drowned in floods of wine, and lighted by the fires of the wealthiest palace of Rome!

It had been intended to keep this frantic determination a profound secret, to let the mighty catastrophe burst upon the remaining inhabitants of the city like a prodigy from heaven; but the slaves intrusted with the organisation of the suicide banquet had been bribed to their tasks with wine, and in the carelessness of intoxication had revealed to others whatever they heard within the palace walls. The news passed from mouth to mouth. There was enough in the prospect of beholding the burning palace and the drunken suicide of its desperate guests to animate even the stagnant curiosity of a famishing mob.

On the appointed evening the people dragged their weary limbs from all quarters of the city towards the Pincian Hill. Many of them died on the way; many lost their resolution to proceed to the end of their journey, and took

shelter sullenly in the empty houses on the road; many found opportunities for plunder and crime as they proceeded, which tempted them from their destination; but many persevered in their purpose--the living dragging the dying along with them, the desperate driving the cowardly before them in malignant sport, until they gained the palace gates. It was by their voices, as they reached her ear from the street, that the fast-sinking faculties of Antonina had been startled, though not revived; and there, on the broad pavement, lay these citizens of a fallen city--a congregation of pestilence and crime--a starving and an awful band!

The moon, brightened by the increasing darkness, now clearly illuminated the street, and revealed, in a narrow space, a various and impressive scene.

One side of the roadway in which stood Vetranio's palace was occupied, along each extremity, as far as the eye could reach at night, by the groves and outbuildings attached to the senator's mansion. The palace grounds, at the higher and farther end of the street--looking from the Pincian Gate--crossed it by a wide archway, and then stretched backward, until they joined the trees of the little garden of Numerian's abode. In a line with this house, but separated from it by a short space, stood a long row of buildings, let out floor by floor to separate occupants, and towering to an unwieldy altitude; for in ancient Rome, as in modern London, in consequence of the high price of land in an over-populated city, builders could only secure space in a dwelling by adding inconveniently to its height. Beyond these habitations rose the trees surrounding another patrician abode; and beyond that the houses took a sudden turn, and nothing more was visible in a straight line but the dusky, indefinite objects of the distant view.

The whole appearance of the street before Vetranio's mansion, had it been unoccupied by the repulsive groups now formed in it, would have been eminently beautiful at the hours of which we now write. The nobly symmetrical frontage of the palace itself, with its graceful succession of long porticoes and colossal statues, contrasted by the picturesquely irregular appearance of the opposite dwelling of Numerian and the lofty houses by its side; the soft, indistinct masses of foliage running parallel along the upper ends of the street, terminated and connected by the archway garden across the road, on which was planted a group of tall pine-trees, rising in gigantic relief against the transparent sky; the brilliant light streaming across the pavement from Vetranio's gaily-curtained windows, immediately opposed by the tranquil moonlight which lit the more distant view--formed altogether a prospect in which the natural and the artificial were mingled together in the most exquisite proportions--a prospect whose ineffable poetry and beauty might, on any other night, have charmed the most careless eye and exalted

the most frivolous mind. But now, overspread as it was by groups of people gaunt with famine and hideous with disease; startled as it was, at gloomy intervals, by contending cries of supplication, defiance, and despair--its brightest beauties of Nature and Art appeared but to shine with an aspect of bitter mockery around the human misery which their splendour disclosed.

Upwards of a hundred people--mostly of the lowest orders--were congregated before the senator's devoted dwelling. Some few among them passed slowly to and fro in the street, their figures gliding shadowy and solemn through the light around them; but the greater number lay on the pavement before the wall of Numerian's dwelling and the doorways of the lofty houses by its side. Illuminated by the full glare of the light from the palace windows, these groups, huddled together in the distorted attitudes of suffering and despair, assumed a fearful and unearthly appearance. Their shrivelled faces, their tattered clothing, their wan forms, here prostrate, there half-raised, were bathed in a steady red glow. High above them, at the windows of the tall houses, now tenanted in every floor by the dead, appeared a few figures (the mercenary guardians of the dying within) bending forward to look out upon the palace opposite--their haggard faces showing pale in the clear moonlight. Sometimes their voices were heard calling in mockery to the mass of people below to break down the strong steel gates of the palace, and tear the full wine-cup from its master's lips. Sometimes those beneath replied with execrations, which rose wildly mingled with the wailing of women and children, the moans of the plague-stricken, and the supplications of the famished to the slaves passing backwards and forwards behind the palace railings for charity and help.

In the intervals, when the tumult of weak voices was partially lulled, there was heard a dull, regular, beating sound, produced by those who had found dry bones on their road to the palace, and were pounding them on the pavement, in sheltered places, for food. The wind, which had been refreshing during the day, had changed at sunset, and now swept up slowly over the street in hot, faint gusts, plague-laden, from the East. Particles of the ragged clothing on some prostrate forms lying most exposed in its course waved slowly to and fro, as it passed, like banners planted by Death on the yielding defences of the citadel of Life. It wound through the open windows of the palace, hot and mephitic, as if tainted with the breath of the foul and furious words which it bore onward into the banqueting-hall of the senator's reckless guests. Driven over such scenes as now spread beneath it, it derived from them a portentous significance; it seemed to blow like an atmosphere exuded from the furnace-depths of centre earth, breathing sinister warnings of some deadly convulsion in the whole fabric of Nature over the thronged and dismal street.

Such was the prospect before the palace, and such the spectators assembled in ferocious anxiety to behold the destruction of the senator's abode. Meanwhile, within the walls of the building, the beginning of the fatal orgie was at hand.

It had been covenanted by the slaves (who, during the calamities in the besieged city, had relaxed in their accustomed implicit obedience to their master with perfect impunity), that, as soon as the last labours of preparation were completed, they should be free to consult their own safety by quitting the devoted palace. Already some of the weakest and most timid of their numbers might be seen passing out hastily into the gardens by the back gates, like engineers who had fired a train, and were escaping ere the explosion burst forth. Those among the menials who still remained in the palace were for the greater part occupied in drinking from the vases of wine which had been placed before them, to preserve to the last moment their failing strength.

The mockery of festivity had been extended even to their dresses--green liveries girt with cherry-coloured girdles arrayed their wasted forms. They drank in utter silence. Not the slightest appearance of revelry or intoxication prevailed among their ranks. Confusedly huddled together, as if for mutual protection, they ever and anon cast quick glances of suspicion and apprehension upon some six or eight of the superior attendants of the palace, who walked backwards and forwards at the outer extremity of the hall occupied by their comrades, and occasionally advancing along the straight passages before them to the front gates of the building, appeared to be exchanging furtive signals with some of the people in the street. Reports had been vaguely spread of a secret conspiracy between some of the principal of the slaves and certain chosen ruffians of the populace, to murder all the inmates of the palace, seize on its treasures, and, opening the city gates to the Goths, escape with their booty during the confusion of the pillage of Rome. Nothing had as yet been positively discovered; but the few attendants who kept ominously apart from the rest were unanimously suspected by their fellows, who now watched them over their wine-cups with anxious eyes. Different as was the scene among the slaves still left in the palace from the scene among the people dispersed in the street, the one was nevertheless in its own degree as gloomily suggestive of some great impending calamity as the other.

The grand banqueting-hall of the palace, prepared though it now was for festivity, wore a changed and melancholy aspect.

The massive tables still ran down the whole length of the noble room, surrounded by luxurious couches, as in former days, but not a vestige of food appeared upon their glittering surfaces. Rich vases, flasks, and drinking-cups, all filled with wine, alone occupied the festal board. Above, hanging low from the ceiling, burnt ten large lamps, corresponding to the number of guests assembled, as the only procurable representatives of the hundreds of revellers who had feasted at Vetrano's expense during the brilliant nights that were now passed for ever. At the lower end of the room, beyond the grand door of entrance, hung a thick black curtain, apparently intended to conceal mysteriously some object behind it. Before the curtain burnt a small lamp of yellow glass, raised upon a high gilt pole, and around and beneath it, heaped against the side walls, and over part of the table, lay a various and confused mass of rich objects, all of a nature more or less inflammable, and all besprinkled with scented oils. Hundreds of yards of gorgeously variegated hangings, rolls upon rolls of manuscripts, gaudy dresses of all colours, toys, utensils, innumerable articles of furniture formed in rare and beautifully inlaid woods, were carelessly flung together against the walls of the apartment, and rose high towards its ceiling.

On every part of the tables not occupied by the vases of wine were laid gold and jewelled ornaments which dazzled the eye by their brilliancy; while, in extraordinary contrast to the magnificence thus profusely displayed, there appeared in one of the upper corners of the hall an old wooden stand covered by a coarse cloth, on which were placed one or two common earthenware bowls, containing what may be termed a 'mash' of boiled bran and salted horseflesh. Any repulsive odour which might have arisen from this strange compound was overpowered by the various perfumes sprinkled about the room, which, mingling with the hot breezes wafted through the windows from the street, produced an atmosphere as oppressive and debilitating, in spite of its artificial allurements to the sense of smell, as the air of a dungeon or the vapours of a marsh.

Remarkable as was the change in the present appearance of the banqueting-hall, it was but the feeble reflection of the alteration for the worse in the aspect of the host and his guests. Vetrano reclined at the head of the table, dressed in a scarlet mantle. An embroidered towel with purple tassels and fringes, connected with rings of gold, fell over his breast, and silver and ivory bracelets were clasped round his arms. But of the former man the habiliments were all that remained. His head was bent forward, as if with the weakness of age; his emaciated arms seemed barely able to support the weight of the ornaments which glittered on them; his eyes had contracted a wild, unsettled expression; and a deadly paleness overspread the once plump and jovial cheeks which so many mistresses had kissed in mercenary

rapture in other days. Both in countenance and manner the elegant voluptuary of our former acquaintance at the Court of Ravenna was entirely and fatally changed. Of the other eight patricians who lay on the couches around their altered host--some wild and reckless, some gloomy and imbecile--all had suffered in the ordeal of the siege, the famine, and the pestilence, like him.

Such were the members of the assemblage, represented from the ceiling by nine of the burning lamps. The tenth and last lamp indicated the presence of one more guest who reclined a little apart from the rest.

This man was hump-backed; his gaunt, bony features were repulsively disproportioned to his puny frame, which looked doubly contemptible, enveloped as it was in an ample tawdry robe. Sprung from the lowest ranks of the populace, he had gradually forced himself into the favour of his superiors by his skill in coarse mimicry, and his readiness in ministering to the worst vices of all who would employ him. Having lost the greater part of his patrons during the siege, finding himself abandoned to starvation on all sides, he had now, as a last resource, obtained permission to participate in the Banquet of Famine, to enliven it by a final exhibition of his buffoonery, and to die with his masters, as he had lived with them--the slave, the parasite, and the imitator of the lowest of their vices and the worst of their crimes.

At the commencement of the orgie, little was audible beyond the clash of the wine-cups, the low occasional whispering of the revellers, and the confused voices of the people without, floating through the window from the street. The desperate compact of the guests, now that its execution had actually begun, awed them at first in spite of themselves. At length, when there was a lull of all sounds--when a temporary calm prevailed over the noises outside--when the wine-cups were emptied, and left for a moment ere they were filled again--Vetranio feebly rose, and, announcing with a mocking smile that he was about to speak a funeral oration over his friends and himself, pointed to the wall immediately behind him as to an object fitted to awaken the astonishment or the hilarity of his moody guests.

Against the upper part of the wall were fixed various small statues in bronze and marble, all representing the owner of the palace, and all hung with golden plates. Beneath these appeared the rent-roll of his estates, written in various colours on white vellum, and beneath that, scratched on the marble in faint irregular characters, was no less an object than his own epitaph, composed by himself. It may be translated thus:--

Stop, Spectator! If thou has reverently cultivated the pleasures of the taste, pause amid these illustrious ruins of what was once a palace, and peruse with respect on this stone the epitaph of VETRANIO, a senator. He was the first man who invented a successful nightingale sauce; his bold and creative genius added much, and would have added more, to THE ART OF COOKERY; but, alas for the interests of science! he lived in the days when the Gothic barbarians besieged THE IMPERIAL CITY; famine left him no matter for gustatory experiment; and pestilence deprived him of cooks to enlighten! Opposed at all points by the force of adverse circumstances, finding his life of no further use to the culinary interests of Rome, he called his chosen friends together to assist him, conscientiously drank up every drop of wine remaining in his cellars, lit the funeral pile of himself and his guests, in the banqueting-hall of his own palace, and died, as he had lived, the patriotic CATO of his country's gastronomy!

'Behold!' cried Vetranio, pointing triumphantly to the epitaph--'behold in every line of those eloquent letters at once the seal of my resolute adherence to the engagement that unites us here, and the foundation of my just claim to the reverence of posterity on the most useful of the arts which I exercised for the benefit of my species! Read, friends, brethren, fellow-martyrs of glory, and, as you read, rejoice with me over the hour of our departure from the desecrated arena, no longer worthy the celebration of the Games of Life! Yet, ere the feast proceeds, hear me while I speak--I make my last oration as the arbiter of our funeral sports, as the host of the Banquet of Famine!

'Who would sink ignobly beneath the slow superiority of starvation, or perish under the quickly glancing steel of the barbarian conqueror's sword, when such a death as ours is offered to the choice?--when wine flows bright, to drown sensation in oblivion, and a palace and its treasures furnish alike the scene of the revel and the radiant funeral pile? The mighty philosophers of India--the inspired Gymnosophists--died as we shall die! Calanus before Alexander, Zamarus in the presence of Augustus, lit the fires that consumed them! Let us follow their glorious example! No worms will prey upon our bodies, no hired mourners will howl discordant at our funerals! Purified in the radiance of primeval fire, we shall vanish triumphant from enemies and friends--a marvel to the earth, a vision of glory to the gods themselves!

'Is it a day more or a day less of life that is now of importance to us? No; it is only towards the easiest and the noblest death that our aspirations can turn! Among our number there is now not one whom the care of existence can further occupy!

'Here, at my right hand, reclines my estimable comrade of a thousand former feasts, Furius Balburius Placidus, who, when we sailed on the Lucrine Lake, was wont to complain of intolerable hardship if a fly settled on the gilded folds of his umbrella; who languished for a land of Cimmerian darkness if a sunbeam penetrated the silken awnings of his garden-terrace; and who now wrangles for a mouthful of horseflesh with the meanest of his slaves, and would exchange the richest of his country villas for a basket of dirty bread! O Furius Balburius Placidus, of what further use is life to thee?

'There, at my left, I discern the changed though still expressive countenance of the resolute Thascius, he who chastised a slave with a hundred lashes if his warm water was not brought immediately at his command; he whose serene contempt for every member of the human species by himself once ranked him among the greatest of human philosophers; even he now wanders through his palace unserved, and fawns upon the plebeian who will sell him a measure of wretched bran! Oh, admired friend, oh, rightly reasoning Thascius, say, is there anything in Rome which should delay thee on thy journey to the Elysian Fields?

'Farther onward at the table, drinking largely while I speak, I behold, O Marcus Moecius Moemmius, thy once plump and jovial form!--thou, in former days accustomed to rejoice in the length of thy name, because it enabled thy friends to drink the more in drinking a cup to each letter of it, tell me what banqueting-hall is now open to thee but this?--and thus desolate in the city of thy social triumphs, what should disincline thee to make of our festal solemnity thy last revel on earth?

'Thou, too, facetious hunchback, prince of parasites, unscrupulous Reburus, where, but at this banquet of famine, will thy buffoonery now procure for thee a draught of reviving wine? Thy masters have abandoned thee to thy native dunghill! No more shalt thou wheedle for them when they borrow, or bully for them when they pay! No more charges of poisoning or magic shalt thou forge to imprison their troublesome creditors! Oh, officious sycophant, thy occupations are no more! Drink while thou canst, and then resign thy carcass to congenial mire!

'And you, my five remaining friends, whom--little desirous of further delay--I will collectively address, think on the days when the suspicion of an infectious malady in any one of your companions was sufficient to separate you from the dearest of them; when the slaves who came to you from their palaces underwent long ceremonies of ablution before they approached your presence; and remembering this, reflect that most, perhaps all of us, now meet here plague-tainted already; and then say, of what advantage is it to

languish for a life which is yours no longer?

'No, my friends, my brethren of the banquet; feeling that when life is worthless it is folly to live, you cannot shrink from the lofty resolution by which we are bound, you cannot pause on our joyful journey of departure from the scenes of earth--I wrong you even by a doubt! Let me now, rather, ask your attention for a worthier subject--the enumeration of the festal ceremonies by which the progress of the banquet will be marked. That task concluded, that last ceremony of my last welcome to you these halls duly performed, I join you once more in your final homage to the deity of our social lives--the God of Wine!

'It is not unknown to you--learned as you are in the jovial antiquities of the table--that it was, among some of the ancients, a custom for a master-spirit of philosophy to preside--the teacher as well as the guest--at their feasts. This usage it has been my care to revive, and, as this four meeting is unparalleled in its heroic design, so it was my ambition to bid to it one unparalleled, either as a teacher or a guest. Fired by an original idea, unobserved of my slaves, aided only by my singing-boy, the faithful Glyco, I have succeeded in placing behind that black curtain such an associate of our revels as you have never feasted with before, whose appearance at the fitting moment must strike you irresistibly with astonishment, and whose discourse--not of human wisdom only--will be inspired by the midnight secrets of the tomb. By my side, on this parchment, lies the formulary of questions to be addressed by Reburus, when the curtain is withdrawn, to the Oracle of the Mysteries of other Spheres.

'Before you, behold in those vases all that remains of my once well-stocked cellars, and all that is provided for the palates of my guests! We sit at the Banquet of Famine, and no coarser sustenance than inspiring wine finds admittance at the Bacchanalian board. Yet, should any among us, in his last moments, be feeble enough to pollute his lips with nourishment alone worthy of the vermin of the earth, let him seek the wretched and scanty table, type of the wretched and scanty food that covers it, placed yonder in obscurity behind me. There will he find (in all barely sufficient for one man's poorest meal) the last morsels of the vilest nourishment left in the palace. For me, my resolution is fixed--it is only the generous wine-cup that shall now approach my lips!

'Above me are the ten lamps, answering to the number of my friends here assembled. One after another, as the wine overpowers us, those burning images of life will be extinguished in succession by the guests who remain proof against our draughts; and the last of these, lighting this torch at the

last lamp, will consummate the banquet, and celebrate its glorious close, by firing the funeral pile of my treasures heaped yonder against my palace walls! If my powers fail me before yours, swear to me that whoever among you is able to lift the cup to his lips after it has dropped from the hands of the rest, will fire the pile! Swear it by your lost mistresses, your lost friends, your lost treasures!--by your own lives, devoted to the pleasures of wine and the purification of fire!

As, with flashing eyes and flushed countenance, Vetrano sank back on his couch, his companions, inflamed with the wine they had already drunk, arose cup in hand, and turned towards him. Their voices, discordantly mingled, pronounced the oath together; then, as they resumed their former positions, their eyes all turned towards the black curtain in ardent expectation.

They had observed the sinister and sarcastic expression of Vetrano's eye as he spoke of his concealed guest; they knew that the hunchback Reburus possessed, among his other powers of buffoonery, the art of ventriloquism; and they suspected the presence of some hideous or grotesque image of a heathen god or demon in the hidden recess, which the jugglery of the parasite was to gift with the capacity of speech. Blasphemous comments upon life, death, and immortality were eagerly awaited. The general impatience for the withdrawal of the curtain was perceived by Vetrano, who, waving his hand for silence, authoritatively exclaimed--

'The hour has not yet arrived. More draughts must be drunk, more libations poured out, ere the mystery of the curtain is revealed! Ho, Glyco!' he continued, turning towards the singing-boy, who had silently entered the room, 'the moment is yours! Tune your lyre, and recite my last ode, which I have addressed to you! Let the charms of Poetry preside over the feast of Death!'

The boy advanced, trembling; his once ruddy face was colourless and haggard; his eyes were fixed with a look of rigid terror on the black curtain; his features palpably expressed the presence within him of some secret and overwhelming recollection which had crushed all his other faculties and perceptions. Steadily, almost guiltily, averting his face from his master's countenance, he stood by Vetrano's couch, a frail and fallen being, a mournful spectacle of perverted docility and degraded youth.

Still true, however, to the duties of his vocation, he ran his thin, trembling fingers over the lyre, and mechanically preluded the commencement of the ode. But during the silence of attention which now prevailed, the confused

noises from the people in the street penetrated more distinctly into the banqueting-room; and at this moment, high above them all--hoarse, raving, terrible, rose the voice of one man.

'Tell me not,' it cried, 'of perfumes wafted from the palace!--foul vapours flow from it!--see, they sink, suffocating over me!--they bathe sky and earth, and men who move around us, in fierce, green light!'

Then other voices of men and women, shrill and savage, broke forth in interruption together:--'Peace, Davus! you awake the dead about you! 'Hide in the darkness; you are plague-struck; your skin is shrivelled; your gums are toothless!' 'When the palace is fired you shall be flung into the flames to purify your rotten carcass!'

'Sing!' cried Vetrano furiously, observing the shudders that ran over the boy's frame and held him speechless. 'Strike the lyre, as Timotheus struck it before Alexander! Drown in melody the barking of the curs who wait for our offal in the street!'

Feebly and interruptedly the terrified boy began; the wild continuous noises of the moaning voices from without sounding their awful accompaniment to the infidel philosophy of his song as he breathed it forth in faint and faltering accents. It ran thus:--

TO GLYCO

Ah, Glyco! why in flow'rs array'd? Those festive wreaths less quickly
fade Than briefly-blooming joy! Those high-prized friends who share
your mirth Are counterfeits of brittle earth, False coin'd in Death's
alloy!

The bliss your notes could once inspire, When lightly o'er the god-like
lyre Your nimble fingers pass'd, Shall spring the same from others'
skill-- When you're forgot, the music still The player shall outlast!

The sun-touch'd cloud that mounts the sky, That brightly glows to
warm the eye, Then fades we know not where, Is image of the little
breath Of life--and then, the doom of Death That you and I must share!

Helpless to make or mar our birth, We blindly grope the ways of earth,
And live our paltry hour; Sure, that when life has ceased to please, To
die at will, in Stoic ease, Is yielded to our pow'r!

Who, timely wise, would meanly wait The dull delay of tardy Fate,
When Life's delights are shorn? No! When its outer gloss has flown,
Let's fling the tarnish'd bauble down As lightly as 'twas worn.

'A health to Glyco! A deep draught to a singer from heaven come down upon earth!' cried the guests, seizing their wine-cups, as the ode was concluded, and draining them to the last drop. But their drunken applause fell noiseless upon the ear to which it was addressed. The boy's voice, as he sang the final stanza of the ode, had suddenly changed to a shrill, almost an unearthly tone, then suddenly sank again as he breathed forth the last few notes; and now as his dissolute audience turned towards him with approving glances, they saw him standing before them cold, rigid, and voiceless. The next instant his fixed features were suddenly distorted, his whole frame collapsed as if torn by an internal spasm--he fell back heavily to the floor. Those around approached him with unsteady feet, and raised him in their arms. His soul had burst the bonds of vice in which others had entangled it; the voice of Death had whispered to the slave of the great despot, Crime--'Be free!'

'We have heard the note of the swan singing its own funeral hymn!' said the patrician Placidus, looking in maudlin pity from the corpse of the boy to the face of Vetranio, which presented for the moment an involuntary expression of grief and remorse.

'Our miracle of beauty and boy-god of melody has departed before us to the Elysian fields!' muttered the hunchback Reburus, in harsh, sarcastic accents.

Then, during the short silence that ensued, the voices from the street, joined on this occasion to a noise of approaching footsteps on the pavement, became again distinctly audible in the banqueting-hall. 'News! news!' cried these fresh auxiliaries of the horde already assembled before the palace. 'Keep together, you who still care for your lives! Solitary citizens have been lured by strange men into desolate streets, and never seen again! Jars of newly salted flesh, which there were no beasts left in the city to supply, have been found in a butcher's shop! Keep together! Keep together!'

'No cannibals among the mob shall pollute the body of my poor boy!' cried Vetranio, rousing himself from his short lethargy of grief. 'Ho! Thascius! Marcus! you who can yet stand! let us bear him to the funeral pile! He has died first--his ashes shall be first consumed!'

The two patricians arose as the senator spoke, and aided him in carrying

the body to the lower end of the room, where it was laid across the table, beneath the black curtain, and between the heaps of drapery and furniture piled up against each of the walls. Then, as his guests reeled back to their places, Vetrano, remaining by the side of the corpse, and seizing in his unsteady hands a small vase of wine, exclaimed in tones of fierce exultation: 'The hour has come--the Banquet of Famine has ended--the Banquet of Death has begun! A health to the guest behind the curtain! Fill--drink--behold!'

He drank deeply from the vase as he ceased, and drew aside the black drapery above him. A cry of terror and astonishment burst from the intoxicated guests as they beheld in the recess now disclosed to view the corpse of an aged woman, clothed in white, and propped up on a high, black throne, with the face turned towards them, and the arms (artificially supported) stretched out as if in denunciation over the banqueting-table. The lamp of yellow glass, which burnt high above the body, threw over it a lurid and flickering light; the eyes were open, the jaw had fallen, the long grey tresses drooped heavily on either side of the white hollow cheeks.

'Behold!' cried Vetrano, pointing to the corpse--'Behold my secret guest! Who so fit as the dead to preside at the Banquet of Death? Compelling the aid of Glyco, shrouded by congenial night, seizing on the first corpse exposed before me in the street, I have set up there, unsuspected by all, the proper idol of our worship, and philosopher at our feast! Another health to the queen of the fatal revels--to the teacher of the mysteries of worlds unseen--rescued from rotting unburied, to perish in the consecrated flames with the senators of Rome! A health!--a health to the mighty mother, ere she begin the mystic revelations! Fill--drink!'

Fired by their host's example, recovered from their momentary awe, already inflamed by the mad recklessness of debauchery, the guests started from their couches, and with Bacchanalian shouts answered Vetrano's challenge. The scene at this moment approached the supernatural. The wild disorder of the richly laden tables; the wine flowing over the floor from overthrown vases; the great lamps burning bright and steady over the confusion beneath; the fierce gestures, the disordered countenances of the revellers, as they waved their jewelled cups over their heads in frantic triumph; and then the gloomy and terrific prospect at the lower end of the hall--the black curtain, the light burning solitary on its high pole, the dead boy lying across the festal table, the living master standing by his side, and, like an evil spirit, pointing upward in mockery to the white-robed corpse of the woman, as it towered above all in its unnatural position, with its skinny arms stretched forth, with its ghastly features appearing to move as the faint and

flickering light played over them,--produced together such a combination of scarce-earthly objects as might be painted, but cannot be described. It was an embodiment of a sorcerer's vision--an apocalypse of sin triumphing over the world's last relics of mortality in the vaults of death.

'To your task, Reburrus!' cried Vetrano, when the tumult was lulled; 'to your questions without delay! Behold the teacher with whom you are to hold commune! Peruse carefully the parchment in your hand; question, and question loudly--you speak to the apathetic dead!'

For some time before the disclosure of the corpse, the hunchback had been seated apart at the end of the banqueting-hall opposite the black-curtained recess, conning over the manuscript containing the list of questions and answers which formed the impious dialogue he was to hold, by the aid of his powers of ventriloquism, with the violated dead. When the curtain was withdrawn he had looked up for a moment, and had greeted the appearance of the sight behind it with a laugh of brutal derision, returning immediately to the study of his blasphemous formulary which had been confided to his care. At the moment when Vetrano's commands were addressed to him he arose, reeled down the apartment towards the corpse, and, opening the dialogue as he approached it, began in loud jeering tones: 'Speak, miserable relict of decrepit mortality!'

He paused as he uttered the last word, and gaining a point of view from which the light of the lamp fell full upon the solemn and stony features of the corpse, looked up defiantly at it. In an instant a frightful change passed over him, the manuscript dropped from his hand, his deformed frame shrank and tottered, a shrill cry of recognition burst from his lips, more like the yell of a wild beast than the voice of a man.

The next moment, when the guests started up to question or deride him, he turned slowly and faced them. Desperate and drunken as they were, his look awed them into utter silence. His face was deathlike in hue, as the face of the corpse above him--thick drops of perspiration trickled down it like rain--his dry glaring eyes wandered fiercely over the startled countenances before him, and, as he extended towards them his clenched hands, he muttered in a deep gasping whisper: 'Who has done this? MY MOTHER! MY MOTHER!'

As these few words--of awful import though of simple form--fell upon the ears of those whom he addressed, such of them as were not already sunk in insensibility looked round on each other almost sobered for the moment, and all speechless alike. Not even the clash of the wine-cups was now heard

at the banqueting-table--nothing was audible but the sound, still fitfully rising and falling, of the voices of terror, ribaldry, and anguish from the street; and the hoarse convulsive accents of the hunchback, still uttering at intervals his fearful identification of the dead body above him: 'MY MOTHER! MY MOTHER!'

At length Vetrano, who was the first to recover himself, addressed the terrified and degraded wretch before him, in tones which, in spite of himself, betrayed, as he began, an unwonted tremulousness and restraint. 'What, Reburrus!' he cried, 'are you already drunken to insanity, that you call the first dead body which by chance I encountered in the street, and by chance brought hither, your mother? Was it to talk of your mother, whom dead or alive we neither know nor care for, that you were admitted here? Son of obscurity and inheritor of rags, what are your plebeian parents to us!' he continued, refilling his cup, and lashing himself into assumed anger as he spoke. 'To your dialogue without delay, or you shall be flung from the windows to mingle with your rabble-equals in the street!'

Neither by word nor look did the hunchback answer the senator's menaces. For him, the voice of the living was stifled in the presence of the dead. The retribution that had gone forth against him had struck his moral, as a thunderbolt might have stricken his physical being. His soul strove in agony within him, as he thought on the awful fatality which had set the dead mother in judgment on the degraded son--which had directed the hand of the senator unwittingly to select the corpse of the outraged parent as the object for the infidel buffoonery of the reckless child, at the very close of his impious career. His past life rose before him, for the first time, like a foul vision, like a nightmare of horror, impurity, and crime. He staggered up the room, groping his way along the wall, as if the darkness of midnight had closed round his eyes, and crouched down by the open window. Beneath him rose the evil and ominous voices from the street; around him spread the pitiless array of his masters; before him appeared the denouncing vision of the corpse.

He would have remained but a short time unmolested in his place of refuge, but for an event which now diverted from him the attention of Vetrano and his guests. Drinking furiously to drown all recollection of the catastrophe they had just witnessed, three of the revellers had already suffered the worst consequences of an excess, which their weakened frames were ill-fitted to bear. One after another, at short intervals, they fell back senseless on their couches; and one after another, as they succumbed, the three lamps burning nearest to them were extinguished. The same speedy termination to the debauch seemed to be in reserve for the rest of their companions,

with the exception of Vetrano and the two patricians who reclined at his right hand and his left. These three still preserved the appearance of self-possession, but an ominous change had already overspread their countenances. The expression of wild joviality, of fierce recklessness, had departed from their wild features; they silently watched each other with vigilant and suspicious eyes; each in turn, as he filled his wine-cup, significantly handled the torch with which the last drinker was to fire the funeral pile. As the numbers of their rivals decreased, and the flame of lamp after lamp was extinguished, the fatal contest for a suicide supremacy assumed a present and powerful interest, in which all other purposes and objects were forgotten. The corpse at the foot of the banqueting-table, and the wretch cowering in his misery at the window, were now alike unheeded. In the bewildered and brutalised minds of the guests, one sensation alone remained--the intensity of expectation which precedes the result of a deadly strife.

But ere long--awakening the attention which might otherwise never have been aroused--the voice of the hunchback was heard, as the spirit of repentance now moved within him, uttering, in wild, moaning tones, a strange confession of degradation and sin--addressed to none; proceeding, independent of consciousness or will, from the depths of his stricken soul. He half raised himself, and fixed his sunken eyes upon the dead body, as these words dropped from his lips: 'It was the last time that I beheld her alive, when she approached me--lonely, and feeble, and poor--in the street, beseeching me to return to her in the days of her old age and her solitude, and to remember how she had loved me in my childhood for my very deformity, how she had watched me throughout the highways of Rome, that none should oppress or deride me! The tears ran down her cheeks, she knelt to me on the hard pavement, and I, who had deserted her for her poverty, to make myself a slave in palaces among the accursed rich, flung down money to her as to a beggar who wearied me, and passed on! She died desolate; her body lay unburied, and I knew it not! The son who had abandoned the mother never saw her more, until she rose before him there--avenging, horrible, lifeless--a sight of death never to leave him! Woe, woe to the accursed in his deformity, and the accursed of his mother's corpse!'

He paused, and fell back again to the ground, grovelling and speechless. The tyrannic Thascius, regarding him with a scowl of drunken wrath, seized an empty vase, and poisoning it in his unsteady hand, prepared to hurl it at the hunchback's prostrate form, when again a single cry--a woman's--rising above the increasing uproar in the street, rang shrill and startling through the banqueting-hall. The patrician suspended his purpose as he heard it, mechanically listening with the half-stupid, half-cunning attention of

intoxication. 'Help! help!' shrieked the voice beneath the palace windows-- 'he follows me still--he attacked my dead child in my arms! As I flung myself down upon it on the ground, I saw him watching his opportunity to drag it by the limbs from under me--famine and madness were in his eyes--I drove him back--I fled--he follows me still!--save us, save us!'

At this instant her voice was suddenly stifled in the sound of fierce cries and rushing footsteps, followed by an appalling noise of heavy blows, directed at several points, against the steel railings before the palace doors. Between the blows, which fell slowly and together at regular intervals, the infuriated wretches, whose last exertions of strength were strained to the utmost to deal them, could be heard shouting breathlessly to each other: 'Strike harder, strike harder! the back gates are guarded against us by our comrades admitted to the pillage of the palace instead of us. You who would share the booty, strike firm! the stones are at your feet, the gates of entrance yield before you.'

Meanwhile a confused sound of trampling footsteps and contending voices became audible from the lower apartments of the palace. Doors were violently shut and opened--shouts and execrations echoed and re-echoed along the lofty stone passages leading from the slaves' waiting-rooms to the grand staircase; treachery betrayed itself as openly within the building as violence still proclaimed itself in the assault on the gates outside. The chief slaves had not been suspected by their fellows without a cause; the bands of pillage and murder had been organised in the house of debauchery and death; the chosen adherents from the street had been secretly admitted through the garden gates, and had barred and guarded them against further intrusion--another doom than the doom they had impiously prepared for themselves was approaching the devoted senators, at the hands of the slaves whom they had oppressed, and the plebeians whom they had despised.

At the first sound of the assault without and the first intimation of the treachery within, Vetrano, Thascius, and Marcus started from their couches; the remainder of the guests, incapable either of thought or action, lay, in stupid insensibility, awaiting their fate. These three men alone comprehended the peril that threatened them, and, maddened with drink, defied, in their ferocious desperation, the death that was in store for them. 'Hark! they approach, the rabble revolted from our rule,' cried Vetrano scornfully, 'to take the lives that we despise and the treasures that we have resigned! The hour has come; I go to fire the pile that involves in one common destruction our assassins and ourselves!'

'Hold!' exclaimed Thascius, snatching the torch from his hand; 'the entrance must first be defended, or, ere the flames are kindled, the slaves will be here! Whatever is movable--couches, tables, corpses--let us hurl them all against the door!'

As he spoke he rushed towards the black-curtained recess, to set the example to his companions by seizing the corpse of the woman; but he had not passed more than half the length of the apartment, when the hunchback, who had followed him unheeded, sprang upon him from behind, and, with a shrill cry, fastening his fingers on his throat, hurled him torn and senseless to the floor. 'Who touches the body that is mine?' shrieked the deformed wretch, rising from his victim, and threatening with his blood-stained hands Vetranio and Marcus, as they stood bewildered, and uncertain for the moment whether first to avenge their comrade or to barricade the door--'The son shall rescue the mother! I go to bury her! Atonement! Atonement!'

He leaped upon the table as he spoke, tore asunder with resistless strength the cords which fastened the corpse to the throne, seized it in his arms, and the next instant gained the door. Uttering fierce, inarticulate cries, partly of anguish and partly of defiance, he threw it open, and stepped forward to descend, when he was met at the head of the stairs by the band of assassins hurrying up, with drawn swords and blazing torches, to their work of pillage and death. He stood before them--his deformed limbs set as firmly on the ground as if he were preparing to descend the stairs at one leap--with the corpse raised high on his breast; its unearthly features were turned towards them, its bare arms were still stretched forth as they had been extended over the banqueting-table, its grey hair streamed back and mingled with his own: under the fitful illumination of the torches, which played red and wild over him and his fearful burden, the dead and the living looked joined to each other in one monstrous form.

Huddled together, motionless, on the stairs, their shouts of vengeance and fury frozen on their lips, the assassins stood for one moment, staring mechanically, with fixed, spell-bound eyes, upon the hideous bulwark opposing their advance on the victims whom they had expected so easily to surprise. The next instant a superstitious panic seized them; as the hunchback suddenly moved towards them to descend, the corpse seemed to their terror-stricken eyes to be on the eve of bursting its way through their ranks. Ignorant of its introduction into the palace, imagining it, in the revival of their slavish fears, to be the spectral offspring of the magic incantations of the senators above, they turned with one accord and fled down the stairs. The sound of their cries of fear grew fainter and fainter in

the direction of the garden as they hurried through the secret gates at the back of the building. Then the heavy, regular tump of the hunchback's footsteps, as he paced the solitary corridors after them, bearing his burden of death, became audible in awful distinctness; then that sound also died away and was lost, and nothing more was heard in the banqueting-room save the sharp clang of the blows still dealt against the steel railings from the street.

But now these grew rare and more rare in their recurrence; the strong metal resisted triumphantly the utmost efforts of the exhausted rabble who assailed it. As the minutes moved on, the blows grew rapidly fainter and fewer; soon they diminished to three, struck at long intervals; soon to one, followed by deep execrations of despair; and, after that, a great silence sank down over the palace and the street, where such strife and confusion had startled the night-echoes but a few moments before.

In the banqueting-hall this rapid succession of events--the marvels of a few minutes--passed before Vetrano and Marcus as visions beheld by their eyes, but neither contained nor comprehended by their minds. Stolid in their obstinate recklessness, stupefied by the spectacle of the startling perils--menacing yet harmless, terrifying though transitory--which surrounded them, neither of the senators moved a muscle or uttered a word, from the period when Thascius had fallen beneath the hunchback's attack, to the period when the last blow against the palace railings, and the last sound of voices from the street, had ceased in silence. Then the wild current of drunken exultation, suspended within them during this brief interval, flowed once more, doubly fierce, in its old course. Insensible, the moment after they had passed away, to the warning and terrific scenes they had beheld, each now looked round on the other with a glance of triumphant levity. 'Hark!' cried Vetrano, 'the mob without, feeble and cowardly to the last, abandon their puny efforts to force my palace gates! Behold our banqueting-tables still sacred from the intrusion of the revolted menials, driven before my guest from the dead, like a flock of sheep before a single dog! Say, O Marcus! did I not well to set the corpse at the foot of our banqueting-table? What marvels has it not effected, borne before us by the frantic Reburus, as a banner of the hosts of death, against the cowardly slaves whose fit inheritance is oppression, and whose sole sensation is fear! See, we are free to continue and conclude the banquet as we had designed! The gods themselves have interfered to raise us in security above our fellow-mortals, whom we despise! Another health, in gratitude to our departed guest, the instrument of our deliverance, under the auspices of omnipotent Jove!'

As Vetricano spoke, Marcus alone, out of all the revellers, answered his challenge. These two--the last-remaining combatants of the strife--having drained their cups to the health proposed, passed slowly down each side of the room, looking contemptuously on their prostrate companions, and extinguishing every lamp but the two which burnt over their own couches. Then returning to the upper end of the tables, they resumed their places, not to leave them again until the fatal rivalry was finally decided, and the moment of firing the pile had actually arrived.

The torch lay between them; the last vases of wine stood at their sides. Not a word escaped the lips of either, to break the deep stillness prevailing over the palace. Each fixed his eyes on the other, in stern and searching scrutiny, and cup for cup, drank in slow and regular alternation. The debauch, which had hitherto presented a spectacle of brutal degradation and violence, now that it was restricted to two men only--each equally unimpressed by the scenes of horror he had beheld, each vying with the other for the attainment of the supreme of depravity--assumed an appearance of hardly human iniquity; it became a contest for a satanic superiority of sin.

For some time little alteration appeared in the countenances of either of the suicide-rivals; but they had now drunk to that final point of excess at which wine either acts as its own antidote, or overwhelms in fatal suffocation the pulses of life. The crisis in the strife was approaching for both, and the first to experience it was Marcus. Vetricano, as he watched him, observed a dark purple flush overspreading his face, hitherto pale, almost colourless. His eyes suddenly dilated; he panted for breath. The vase of wine, when he strove with a last effort to fill his cup from it, rolled from his hand to the floor. The stare of death was in his face as he half-raised himself and for one instant looked steadily on his companion; the moment after, without word or groan, he dropped backward over his couch.

The contest of the night was decided! The host of the banquet and the master of the palace had been reserved to end the one and to fire the other!

A smile of malignant triumph parted Vetricano's lips as he now arose and extinguished the last lamp burning besides his own. That done, he grasped the torch. His eyes, as he raised it, wandered dreamily over the array of his treasures, and the forms of his dead or insensible fellow-patricians around him, to be consumed by his act in annihilating fire. The sensation of his solemn night-solitude in his fated palace began to work in vivid and varying impressions on his mind, which was partially recovering some portion of its wonted acuteness, under the bodily reaction now produced in him by the

very extravagance of the night's excess. His memory began to retrace confusedly the scenes with which the dwelling that he was about to destroy had been connected at distant or at recent periods. At one moment the pomp of former banquets, the jovial congregation of guests since departed or dead, revived before him; at another, he seemed to be acting over again his secret departure from his dwelling on the night before his last feast, his stealthy return with the corpse that he had dragged from the street, his toil in setting it up in mockery behind the black curtain, and inventing the dialogue to be spoken before it by the hunchback. Now his thoughts reverted to the minutest circumstances of the confusion and dismay among the members of his household when the first extremities of the famine began to be felt in the city; and now, without visible connection or cause, they turned suddenly to the morning when he had hurried through the most solitary paths in his grounds to meet the betrayer Ulpian at Numerian's garden gate. Once more the image of Antonina--so often present to his imagination since the original was lost to his eyes--grew palpable before him. He thought of her, as listening at his knees to the sound of his lute; as awakening, bewildered and terrified, in his arms; as flying distractedly before her father's wrath; as now too surely lying dead, in her beauty and her innocence, amid the thousand victims of the famine and the plague.

These and other reflections, while they crowded in whirlwind rapidity on his mind, wrought no alteration in the deadly purpose which they suspended. His delay in lighting the torch was the unconscious delay of the suicide, secure in his resolution ere he lifts the poison to his lips--when life rises before him as a thing that is past, and he stands for one tremendous moment in the dark gap between the present and the future--no more the pilgrim of Time--not yet the inheritor of Eternity!

So, in the dimly lighted hall, surrounded by the victims whom he had hurried before him to their doom, stood the lonely master of the great palace; and so spoke within him the mysterious voices of his last earthly thoughts. Gradually they sank and ceased, and stillness and vacancy closed like dark veils over his mind. Starting like one awakened from a trance he once more felt the torch in his hand, and once more the expression of fierce desperation appeared in his eyes as he lit it steadily at the lamp above him.

The dew was falling pure to the polluted earth; the light breezes sang their low daybreak anthem among the leaves to the Power that bade them forth; night had expired, and morning was already born of it, as Vespasian, with the burning torch in his hand, advanced towards the funeral pile.

He had already passed the greater part of the length of the room, when a faint sound of footsteps ascending a private staircase which led to the palace gardens, and communicated with the lower end of the banqueting-hall by a small door of inlaid ivory, suddenly attracted his attention. He hesitated in his deadly purpose, listening to the slow, regular approaching sound, which, feeble though it was, struck mysteriously impressive upon his ear in the dreary silence of all things around him. Holding the torch high above his head, as the footsteps came nearer, he fixed his eyes in intense expectation upon the door. It opened, and the figure of a young girl clothed in white stood before him. One moment he looked upon her with startled eyes; the next the torch dropped from his hand, and smouldered unheeded on the marble floor. It was Antonina!

Her face was overspread with a strange transparent paleness; her once soft, round cheeks had lost their girlish beauty of form; her expression, ineffably mournful, hopeless, and subdued, threw a simple, spiritual solemnity over her whole aspect. She was changed, awfully changed to the profligate senator from the being of his former admiration; but still there remained in her despairing eyes enough of the old look of gentleness and patience, surviving through all anguish and dread, to connect her, even as she was now, with what she had been. She stood in the chamber of debauchery and suicide between the funeral pile and the desperate man who was vowed to fire it, a feeble, helpless creature, yet powerful in the influence of her presence, at such a moment and in such a form, as a saving and reproving spirit, armed with the omnipotence of Heaven to mould the purposes of man.

Awed and astounded, as if he beheld an apparition from the tomb, Vetrano looked upon this young girl--whom he had loved with the least selfish passion that ever inspired him; whom he had lamented as long since lost and dead with the sincerest grief he had ever felt; whom he now saw standing before him at the very moment ere he doomed himself to death, altered, desolate, supplicating--with emotions which held him speechless in wonder, and even in dread. While he still gazed upon her in silence, he heard her speaking to him in low, melancholy, imploring accents, which fell upon his ear, after the voices of terror and desperation that had risen around him throughout the night, like tones never addressed to it before.

'Numerian, my father, is sinking under the famine,' she began; 'if no help is given to him, he may die even before sunrise! You are rich and powerful; I have come to you, having nothing now but his life to live for, to beg sustenance for him!' She paused, overpowered for the moment, and bent her eyes wistfully on the senator's face. Then seeing that he vainly

endeavoured to answer her, her head drooped upon her breast, and her voice sank lower as she continued:--

'I have striven for patience under much sorrow and pain through the long night that is past; my eyes were heavy and my spirit was faint; I could have rendered up my soul willingly in my loneliness and feebleness to God who gave it, but that it was my duty to struggle for my life and my father's, now that I was restored to him after I had lost all beside! I could not think, or move, or weep, as, looking forth upon your palace, I watched and waited through the hours of darkness. But, as morning dawned, the heaviness at my heart was lightened; I remembered that the palace I saw before me was yours; and, though the gates were closed, I knew that I could reach it through your garden that joins to my father's land. I had none in Rome to ask mercy of but you; so I set forth hastily, ere my weakness should overpower me, remembering that I had inherited much misery at your hands, but hoping that you might pity me for what I had suffered when you saw me again. I came wearily through the garden; it was long before I found my way hither; will you send me back as helpless as I came? You first taught me to disobey my father in giving me the lute; will you refuse to aid me in succouring him now? He is all that I have left in the world! Have mercy upon him!--have mercy upon me!'

Again she looked up in Vetrano's face. His trembling lips moved, but still no sound came from them. The expression of confusion and awe yet prevailed over his features as he pointed slowly towards the upper end of the banqueting-table. To her this simple action was eloquent beyond all power of speech; she turned her feeble steps instantly in the direction he had indicated.

He watched her, by the light of the single lamp that still burnt, passing--strong in the shielding inspiration of her good purpose--amid the bodies of his suicide companions without pausing on her way. Having gained the upper end of the room, she took from the table a flask of wine, and from the wooden stand behind it the bowl of offal disdained by the guests at the fatal banquet, returning immediately to the spot where Vetrano still stood. Here she stopped for a moment, as if about to speak once more; but her emotions overpowered her. From the sources which despair and suffering had dried up, the long-prisoned tears once more flowed forth at the bidding of gratitude and hope. She looked upon the senator, silent as himself, and her expression at that instant was destined to remain on his memory while memory survived. Then, with faltering and hasty steps, she departed by the way she had come; and in the great palace, which his evil supremacy over the wills of others had made a hideous charnel-house, he was once more left

alone.

He made no effort to follow or detain her as she left him. The torch still smouldered beside him on the floor, but he never stooped to take it up; he dropped down on a vacant couch, stupefied by what he had beheld. That which no entreaties, no threats, no fierce violence of opposition could have effected in him, the appearance of Antonina had produced--it had forced him to pause at the very moment of the execution of his deadly design.

He remembered how, from the very first day when he had seen her, she had mysteriously influenced the whole progress of his life; how his ardour to possess her had altered his occupations, and even interrupted his amusements; how all his energy and all his wealth had been baffled in the attempt to discover her when she fled from her father's house; how the first feeling of remorse that he had ever known had been awakened within him by his knowledge of the share he had had in producing her unhappy fate. Recalling all this; reflecting that, had she approached him at an earlier period, she would have been driven back affrighted by the drunken clamour of his companions; and had she arrived at a later, would have found his palace in flames; thinking at the same time of her sudden presence in the banqueting-hall when he had believed her to be dead, when her appearance at the moment before he fired the pile was most irresistible in its supernatural influence over his actions--that vague feeling of superstitious dread which exists intuitively in all men's minds, which had never before been aroused in his, thrilled through him. His eyes were fixed on the door by which she had departed, as if he expected her to return. Her destiny seemed to be portentously mingled with his own; his life seemed to move, his death to wait at her bidding. There was no repentance, no moral purification in the emotions which now suspended his bodily faculties in inaction; he was struck for the time with a mental paralysis.

The restless moments moved onward and onward, and still he delayed the consummation of the ruin which the night's debauch had begun. Slowly the tender daylight grew and brightened in its beauty, warmed the cold prostrate bodies in the silent hall, and dimmed the faint glow of the wasting lamp; no black mist of smoke, no red glare of devouring fire arose to quench its fair lustre; no roar of flames interrupted the murmuring morning tranquillity of nature, or startled from their heavy repose the exhausted outcasts stretched upon the pavement of the street. Still the noble palace stood unshaken on its firm foundations; still the adornments of its porticoes and its statues glittered as of old in the rays of the rising sun; and still the hand of the master who had sworn to destroy it, as he had sworn to destroy himself, hung idly near the torch which lay already extinguished in

harmless ashes at his feet.