

CHAPTER 25 - THE TEMPLE AND THE CHURCH

It was Ulpus. The Pagan was changed in bearing and countenance as well as in apparel. He stood more firm and upright; a dull, tawny hue overspread his face; his eyes, so sunken and lustreless in other days, were now distended and bright with the glare of insanity. It seemed as if his bodily powers had renewed their vigour, while his mental faculties had declined towards their ruin.

No human eye had ever beheld by what foul and secret means he had survived through the famine, on what unnatural sustenance he had satisfied the cravings of inexorable hunger; but there, in his gloomy shelter, the madman and the outcast had lived and moved, and suddenly and strangely strengthened, after the people of the city had exhausted all their united responses, lavished in vain all their united wealth, and drooped and died by thousands around him!

His grasp still lay heavy on the father and daughter, and still both confronted him--silent, as if death-struck by his gaze; motionless, as if frozen at his touch. His presence was exerting over them a fatal fascination. The power of action, suspended in Antonina as she entered their ill-chosen refuge, was now arrested in Numerian also; but with him no thought of the enemy in the street had any part, at this moment, in the resistless influence which held him helpless before the enemy in the temple.

It was a feeling of deeper awe and darker horror. For now, as he looked upon the hideous features of Ulpus, as he saw the forbidden robe of priesthood in which the Pagan was arrayed, he beheld not only the traitor who had successfully plotted against the prosperity of his household, but the madman as well,--the moral leper of the whole human family--the living Body and the dead Soul--the disinherited of that Divine Light of Life which it is the awful privilege of mortal man to share with the angels of God.

He still clasped Antonina to his side, but it was unconsciously. To all outward appearance he was helpless as his helpless child, when Ulpus slowly removed his grasp from their shoulders, separated them, and locking the hand of each in his cold, bony fingers, began to speak.

His voice was deep and solemn, but his accents, in their hard, unvarying tone, seemed to express no human emotion. His eyes, far from brightening as he spoke, relapsed into a dull, vacant insensibility. The connection between the action of speech and the accompanying and explaining action of look which is observable in all men, seemed lost in him. It was fearful to

behold the death-like face, and to listen at the same moment to the living voice.

'Lo! the votaries come to the temple!' murmured the Pagan. 'The good servants of the mighty worship gather at the voice of the priest! In the far provinces, where the enemies of the gods approach to profane the sacred groves, behold the scattered people congregating by night to journey to the shrine of Serapis! Adoring thousands kneel beneath the lofty porticoes, while within, in the secret hall where the light is dim, where the air quivers round the breathing deities on their pedestals of gold, the high priest Ulpius reads the destinies of the future, that are unrolled before his eyes like a book!'

As he ceased, and, still holding the hands of his captives, looked on them fixedly as ever, his eyes brightened and dilated again; but they expressed not the slightest recognition either of father or daughter. The delirium of his imagination had transported him to the temple at Alexandria; the days were revived when his glory had risen to its culminating point, when the Christians trembled before him as their fiercest enemy, and the Pagans surrounded him as their last hope. The victims of his former and forgotten treachery were but as two among the throng of votaries allured by the fame of his eloquence, by the triumphant notoriety of his power to protect the adherents of the ancient creed.

But it was not always thus that his madness declared itself: there were moments when it rose to appalling frenzy. Then he imagined himself to be again hurling the Christian assailants from the topmost walls of the besieged temple, in that past time when the image of Serapis was doomed by the Bishop of Alexandria to be destroyed. His yells of fury, his frantic execrations of defiance were heard afar, in the solemn silence of pestilence-stricken Rome. Those who, during the most fatal days of the Gothic blockade, dropped famished on the pavement before the little temple, as they endeavoured to pass it on their onward way, presented a dread reality of death, to embody the madman's visions of battle and slaughter. As these victims of famine lay expiring in the street, they heard above them his raving voice cursing them for Christians, triumphing over them as defeated enemies destroyed by his hand, exhorting his imaginary adherents to fling the slain above on the dead below, until the bodies of the besiegers of the temple were piled, as barriers against their living comrades, round its walls. Sometimes his frenzy gloried in the fancied revival of the foul and sanguinary ceremonies of Pagan superstition. Then he bared his arms, and shouted aloud for the sacrifice; he committed dark and nameless atrocities--for now again the dead and the dying lay before him, to give substance to

the shadow of his evil thoughts; and Plague and Hunger were as creatures of his will, and slew the victim for the altar ready to his hands.

At other times, when the raving fit had passed away, and he lay panting in the darkest corner of the interior of the temple, his insanity assumed another and a mournful form. His voice grew low and moaning; the wreck of his memory--wandering and uncontrollable--floated back, far back, on the dark waters of the past; and his tongue uttered fragments of words and phrases that he had murmured at his father's knees--farewell, childish wishes that he had breathed in his mother's ear--innocent, anxious questions which he had addressed to Macrinus, the high priest, when he first entered the service of the gods at Alexandria. His boyish reveries--the gentleness of speech and poetry of thought of his first youthful days, were now, by the unsearchable and arbitrary influences of his disease, revived in his broken words, renewed in his desolate old age of madness and crime, breathed out in unconscious mockery by his lips, while the foam still gathered about them, and the last flashes of frenzy yet lightened in his eyes.

This unnatural calmness of language and vividness of memory, this treacherous appearance of thoughtful, melancholy self-possession, would often continue through long periods, uninterrupted; but, sooner or later, the sudden change came; the deceitful chain of thought snapped asunder in an instant; the word was left half uttered; the wearied limbs started convulsively into renewed action; and as the dream of violence returned and the dream of peace vanished, the madman rioted afresh in his fury; and journeyed as his visions led him, round and round his temple sanctuary, and hither and thither, when the night was dark and death was busiest in Rome, among the expiring in deserted houses, and the lifeless in the silent streets.

But there were other later events in his existence that never revived within him. The old familiar image of the idol Serapis, which had drawn him into the temple when he re-entered Rome, absorbed in itself and in its associated remembrances all that remained active of his paralysed faculties. His betrayal of his trust in the house of Numerian, his passage through the rifted wall, his crushing repulse in the tent of Alaric, never for a moment occupied his wandering thoughts. The clouds that hung over his mind might open to him parting glimpses of the toils and triumphs of his early career; but they descended in impenetrable darkness on all the after-days of his dreary life.

Such was the being to whose will, by a mysterious fatality, the father and child were now submitted; such the existence--solitary, hopeless,

loathsome--of their stern and wily betrayer of other days!

Since he had ceased speaking, the cold, death-like grasp of his hand had gradually strengthened, and he had begun to look slowly and inquiringly round him from side to side. Had this change marked the approaching return of his raving paroxysm, the lives of Numerian and Antonina would have been sacrificed the next moment; but all that it now denoted was the quickening of the lofty and obscure ideas of celebrity and success, of priestly honour and influence, of the splendour and glory of the gods, which had prompted his last words.

He moved suddenly, and drew the victims of his dangerous caprice a few steps farther into the interior of the temple; then led them close up to the lofty pile of objects which had first attracted Numerian's eyes on entering the building. 'Kneel and adore!' cried the madman fiercely, replacing his hands on their shoulders and pressing them to the ground--'You stand before the gods, in the presence of their high priest!'

The girl's head sank forward, and she hid her face in her hands; but her father looked up tremblingly at the pile. His eyes had insensibly become more accustomed to the dim light of the temple, and he now saw more distinctly the objects composing the mass that rose above him.

Hundreds of images of the gods, in gold, silver, and wood--many in the latter material being larger than life; canopies, vestments, furniture, utensils, all of ancient Pagan form, were heaped together, without order or arrangement, on the floor, to a height of full fifteen feet.

There was something at once hideous and grotesque in the appearance of the pile. The monstrous figures of the idols, with their rude carved draperies and symbolic weapons, lay in every wild variety of position, and presented every startling eccentricity of line, more especially towards the higher portions of the mass, where they had evidently been flung up from the ground by the hand that had raised the structure.

The draperies mixed among the images and the furniture were here coiled serpent-like around them, and there hung down towards the ground, waving slow and solemn in the breezes that wound through the temple doorway. The smaller objects of gold and silver, scattered irregularly over the mass, shone out from it like gleaming eyes; while the pile itself, seen in such a place under a dusky light, looked like some vast, misshapen monster--the gloomy embodiment of the bloodiest superstitions of Paganism, the growth of damp airs and teeming ruin, of shadow and darkness, of accursed and

infected solitude!

Even in its position, as well as in the objects of which it was composed, the pile wore an ominous and startling aspect; its crooked outline, expanding towards the top, was bent over fearfully in the direction of the doorway; it seemed as if a single hand might sway it in its uncertain balance, and hurl it instantly in one solid mass to the floor.

Many toilsome hours had passed away, long secret labour had been expended in the erection of this weird and tottering structure; but it was all the work of one hand. Night after night had the Pagan entered the deserted temples in the surrounding streets, and pillaged them of their contents to enrich his favoured shrine: the removal of the idols from their appointed places, which would have been sacrilege in any meaner man, was in his eyes the dread privilege of the high priest alone.

He had borne heavy burdens, and torn asunder strong fastenings, and journeyed and journeyed again for hours together over the same gloomy streets, without loitering in his task; he had raised treasures and images one above another; he had strengthened the base and heightened the summit of this precious and sacred heap; he had repaired and rebuilt, whenever it crumbled and fell, this new Babel that he longed to rear to the Olympus of the temple roof, with a resolute patience and perseverance that no failure or fatigue could overcome.

It was the dearest purpose of his dreamy superstition to surround himself with innumerable deities, as well as to assemble innumerable worshippers; to make the sacred place of his habitation a mighty Pantheon, as well as a point of juncture for the scattered congregations of the Pagan world. This was the ambition in which his madness expanded to the fiercest fanaticism; and as he now stood erect with his captives beneath him, his glaring eyes looked awe-struck when he fixed them on his idols; he uplifted his arms in solemn, ecstatic triumph, and in low tones poured forth his invocations, wild, intermingled, and fragmentary, as the barbarous altar which his solitary exertions had reared.

Whatever was the effect on Numerian of his savage and confused ejaculations, they were unnoticed, even unheard, by Antonina; for now, while the madman's voice softened to an undertone, and while she hid all surrounding objects from her eyes, her senses were awakened to sounds in the temple which she had never remarked before.

The rapid current of the Tiber washed the foundation walls of one side of the

building, within which the clear, lulling bubble of the water was audible with singular distinctness. But besides this another and a shriller sound caught the ear. On the summit of the temple roof still remained several rows of little gilt bells, originally placed there, partly with the intention of ornamenting this portion of the outer structure, partly in order that the noise they produced, when agitated by the wind, might scare birds from settling in their flight on the consecrated edifice. The sounds produced by these bells were silvery and high pitched; now, when the breeze was strong, they rang together merrily and continuously; now, when it fell, their notes were faint, separate, and irregular, almost plaintive in their pure metallic softness. But, however their tone might vary under the capricious influences of the wind, it seemed always wonderfully mingled within the temple with the low, eternal bubbling of the river, which filled up the slightest pauses in the pleasant chiming of the bells, and ever preserved its gentle and monotonous harmony just audible beneath them.

There was something in this quaint, unwonted combination of sounds, as they were heard in the vaulted interior of the little building, strangely simple, attractive, and spiritual; the longer they were listened to, the more completely did the mind lose the recollection of their real origin, and gradually shape out of them wilder and wilder fancies, until the bells as they rang their small peal seemed like happy voices of a heavenly stream, borne lightly onward on its airy bubbles, and ever rejoicing over the gliding current that murmured to them as it ran.

Spite of the peril of her position, and of the terror which still fixed her speechless and crouching on the ground, the effect on Antonina of the strange mingled music of the running water and the bells was powerful enough, when she first heard it, to suspend all her other emotions in a momentary wonder and doubt. She withdrew her hands from her face, and glanced round mechanically to the doorway, as if she imagined that the sounds proceeded from the street.

When she looked, the declining sun, gliding between two of the outer pillars which surrounded the temple, covered with a bright glow the smooth pavement before the entrance. A swarm of insects flew drowsily round and round in the warm mellow light; their faint monotonous humming deepened, rather than interrupted, the perfect silence prevailing over all things without.

But a change was soon destined to appear in the repose of the quiet, vacant scene; hardly a minute had elapsed while Antonina still looked on it before she saw stealing over the sunny pavement a dark shadow, the same shadow

that she had last beheld when she stopped in her flight to look behind her in the empty street. At first it slowly grew and lengthened, then it remained stationary, then it receded and vanished as gradually as it had advanced, and then the girl heard, or fancied that she heard, a faint sound of footsteps, retiring along the lateral colonnades towards the river side of the building.

A low cry of horror burst from her lips as she sank back towards her father; but it was unheeded. The voice of Ulpian had resumed in the interval its hollow loudness of tone; he had raised Numerian from the ground; his strong, cold grasp, which seemed to penetrate to the old man's heart, which held him motionless and helpless as if by a fatal spell, was on his arm.

'Hear it! hear it!' cried the Pagan, waving his disengaged hand as if he were addressing a vast concourse of people--'I advance this man to be one of the servants of the high priest! He has travelled from a far country to the sacred shrine; he is docile and obedient before the altar of the gods; the lot is cast for his future life; his dwelling shall be in the temple to the day of his death! He shall minister before me in white robes, and swing the smoking censer, and slay the sacrifice at my feet!'

He stopped. A dark and sinister expression appeared in his eyes as the word 'sacrifice' passed his lips; he muttered doubtingly to himself--'The sacrifice!--is it yet the hour of the sacrifice?'--and looked round towards the doorway.

The sun still shone gaily on the outer pavement; the insects still circled slowly in the mellow light; no shadow was now visible; no distant footsteps were heard; there was nothing audible but the happy music of the bubbling water, and the chiming, silvery bells.

For a few moments the madman looked out anxiously towards the street, without uttering a word or moving a muscle. The raving fit was nearly possessing him again, as the thought of the sacrifice flashed over his darkened mind; but once more its approach was delayed.

He slowly turned his head in the direction of the interior of the temple. 'The sun is still bright in the outer courts,' he murmured in an undertone, 'the hour of the sacrifice is not yet! Come!' he continued in a louder voice, shaking Numerian by the arm. 'It is time that the servant of the temple should behold the place of the sacrifice, and sharpen the knife for the victim before sunset! Arouse thee, bondman, and follow me!'

As yet, Numerian had neither spoken, nor attempted to escape. The preceding events, though some space has been occupied in describing them, passed in so short a period of time, that he had not hitherto recovered from the first overwhelming shock of the meeting with Ulpian. But now, awed though he still was, he felt that the moment of the struggle for freedom had arrived.

'Leave me, and let us depart!--there can be no fellowship between us again!' he exclaimed with the reckless courage of despair, taking the hand of Antonina, and striving to free himself from the madman's grasp. But the effort was vain; Ulpian tightened his hold and laughed in triumph. 'What! the servant of the temple is in terror of the high priest, and shrinks from walking in the place of the sacrifice!' he cried. 'Fear not, bondman! The mighty one, who rules over life and death, and time and futurity, deals kindly with the servant of his choice! Onward! onward! to the place of darkness and doom, where I alone am omnipotent, and all others are creatures who tremble and obey! To thy lesson, learner! by sunset the victim must be crowned!'

He looked round on Numerian for an instant, as he prepared to drag him forward, and their eyes met. In the fierce command of his action, and the savage exultation of his glance, the father saw repeated in a wilder form the very attitude and expression which he had beheld in the Pagan on the morning of the loss of his child. All the circumstances of that miserable hour--the vacant bed-chamber--the banished daughter--the triumph of the betrayer--the anguish of the betrayed--rushed over his mind, and rose up before it vivid as a pictured scene before his eyes.

He struggled no more; the powers of resistance in mind and body were crushed alike. He made an effort to remove Antonina from his side, as if, in forgetfulness of the hidden enemy without, he designed to urge her flight through the open door, while the madman's attention was yet distracted from her. But, beyond this last exertion of the strong instinct of paternal love, every other active emotion seemed dead within him.

Vainly had he striven to disentangle the child from the fate that might be in store for the parent. To her the dread of the dark shadow on the pavement was superior to all other apprehensions. She now clung more closely to her father, and tightened her clasp round his hand. So, when the Pagan advanced into the interior of the temple, it was not Numerian alone who followed him to the place of sacrifice, but Antonina as well.

They moved to the back of the pile of idols. Behind it appeared a high

partition of gilt and inlaid wood reaching to the ceiling, and separating the outer from the inner part of the temple. A low archway passage, protected by carved gates similar to those at the front of the building, had been formed in the partition, and through this Ulpius and his prisoners now passed into the recess beyond.

This apartment was considerably smaller than the first hall of the temple which they had just left. The ceiling and the floor both sloped downwards together, and here the rippling of the waters of the Tiber was more distinctly audible to them than in the outer division of the building. At the moment when they entered it the place was very dark; the pile of idols intercepted even the little light that could have been admitted through its narrow entrance; but the dense obscurity was soon dissipated. Dragging Numerian after him to the left side of the recess, Ulpius drew back a sort of wooden shutter, and a vivid ray of sunlight immediately streamed in through a small circular opening pierced in this part of the temple.

Then there became apparent, at the lower end of the apartment, a vast yawning cavity in the wall, high enough to admit a man without stooping, but running downwards almost perpendicularly to some lower region which it was impossible to see, for no light shot upwards from this precipitous artificial abyss, in the darkness of which the eye was lost after it had penetrated to the distance of a few feet only from the opening. At the base of the confined space thus visible appeared the commencement of a flight of steps, evidently leading far downwards into the cavity. On the abruptly sloping walls, which bounded it on all sides, were painted, in the brilliant hues of ancient fresco, representations of the deities of the mythology--all in the attitude of descending into the vault, and all followed by figures of nymphs bearing wreaths of flowers, beautiful birds, and other similar adjuncts of the votive ceremonies of Paganism. The repulsive contrast between the bright colours and graceful forms presented by the frescoes, and the perilous and gloomy appearance of the cavity which they decorated, increased remarkably the startling significance in the character of the whole structure. Its past evil uses seemed ineradicably written over every part of it, as past crime and torment remain ineradicably written on the human face; the mind imbibed from it terrifying ideas of deadly treachery, of secret atrocities, of frightful refinements of torture, which no uninitiated eye had ever beheld, and no human resolution had ever been powerful enough to resist.

But the impressions thus received were not produced only by what was seen in and around this strange vault, but by what was heard there besides. The wind penetrated the cavity at some distance, and through some opening

that could not be beheld, and was apparently intercepted in its passage, for it whistled upwards towards the entrance in shrill, winding notes, sometimes producing another and nearer sound, resembling the clashing of many small metallic substances violently shaken together. The noise of the wind, as well as the bubbling of the current of the Tiber, seemed to proceed from a greater distance than appeared compatible with the narrow extent of the back part of the temple, and the proximity of the river to its low foundation walls.

It was evident that the vault only reached its outlet after it had wound backwards, underneath the building, in some strange complication of passages or labyrinth of artificial caverns, which might have been built long since as dungeons for the living, or as sepulchres for the dead.

'The place of the sacrifice--aha! the place of the sacrifice!' cried the Pagan exultingly, as he drew Numerian to the entrance of the cavity, and solemnly pointed into the darkness beneath.

The father gazed steadily into the chasm, never turning now to look on Antonina, never moving to renew the struggle for freedom. Earthly loves and earthly hopes began to fade away from his heart--he was praying. The solemn words of Christian supplication fell in low, murmuring sounds from his lips, in the place of idolatry and bloodshed, and mingled with the incoherent ejaculations of the madman who kept him captive, and who now bent his glaring eyes on the darkness of the vault, half forgetful, in the gloomy fascination which it exercised even over him, of the prisoners whom he held at its mouth.

The single ray of light, admitted from the circular aperture of the wall, fell wild and fantastic over the widely-differing figures of the three, as they stood so strangely united together before the abyss that opened beneath them. The shadows were above and the shadows were around; there was no light in the ill-omened place but the one vivid ray that streamed over the gaunt figure of Ulpian, as he still pointed into the darkness; over the rigid features of Numerian, praying in the bitterness of expected death; and over the frail youthful form of Antonina as she nestled trembling at her father's side. It was an unearthly and a solemn scene!

Meanwhile the shadow which the girl had observed on the pavement before the doorway of the temple now appeared there again, but not to retire as before; for, the instant after, Goisvintha stealthily entered the outer apartment of the building left vacant by its first occupants. She passed softly around the pile of idols, looked into the inner recess of the temple, and

saw the three figures standing together in the ray of light, gloomy and motionless, before the mouth of the cavity. Her first glance fixed on the Pagan, whom she instinctively doubted and dreaded, whose purpose in keeping captive the father and daughter she could not divine; her next was directed on Antonina.

The girl's position was a guarded one; still holding her father's hand, she was partly protected by his body; and stood unconsciously beneath the arm of Ulpius, as it was raised while he grasped Numerian's shoulder. Marking this, and remembering that Antonina had twice escaped her already, Goisvintha hesitated for a moment, and then, with cautious step and lowering brow, began to retire again towards the doorway of the building. 'Not yet--not yet the time!' she muttered, as she resumed her former lurking-place; 'they stand where the light is over them--the girl is watched and shielded--the two men are still on either side of her! Not yet the moment of the blow; the stroke of the knife must be sure and safe! Sure, for this time she must die by my hand! Safe, for I have other vengeance to wreak besides the vengeance on her! I, who have been patient and cunning since the night when I escaped from Aquileia, will be patient and cunning still! If she passes the door, I slay her as she goes out; if she remains in the temple--'

At the last word, Goisvintha paused and gazed upward; the setting sun threw its fiery glow over her haggard face; her eye brightened fiercely in the full light as she looked. 'The darkness is at hand!' she continued; 'the night will be thick and black in the dim halls of the temple; I shall see her when she shall not see me!--the darkness is coming; the vengeance is sure!'

She closed her lips, and with fatal perseverance continued to watch and wait, as she had resolutely watched and waited already. The Roman and the Goth; the opposite in sex, nation, and fate; the madman who dreamed of the sanguinary superstitions of Paganism before the temple altar, and the assassin who brooded over the chances of bloodshed beneath the temple portico, were now united in a mysterious identity of expectation, uncommunicated and unsuspected by either--the hour when the sun vanished from the heaven was the hour of the sacrifice for both!

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There is now a momentary pause in the progress of events. Occurrences to be hereafter related render it necessary to take advantage of this interval to inform the reader of the real nature and use of the vault in the temple wall, the external appearance of which we have already described.

The marking peculiarity in the construction of the Pagan religion may be most aptly compared to the marking peculiarity in the construction of the pagan temples. Both were designed to attract the general eye by the outward effect only, which was in both the false delusive reflection of the inward substance.

In the temple, the people, as they worshipped beneath the long colonnades, or beheld the lofty porticoes from the street, were left to imagine the corresponding majesty and symmetry of the interior of the structure, and were not admitted to discover how grievously it disappointed the brilliant expectations which the exterior was so well calculated to inspire; how little the dark, narrow halls of the idols, the secret vaults and gloomy recesses within, fulfilled the promise of the long flights of steps, the broad extent of pavement, the massive sun-brightened pillars without. So in the religion, the votary was allured by the splendour of processions; by the pomp of auguries; by the poetry of the superstition which peopled his native woods with the sportive Dryads, and the fountains from which he drank with their guardian Naiads; which gave to mountain and lake, to sun and moon and stars, to all things around and above him, their fantastic allegory, or their gracious legend of beauty and love: but beyond this, his first acquaintance with his worship was not permitted to extend, here his initiation concluded. He was kept in ignorance of the dark and dangerous depths which lurked beneath this smooth and attractive surface; he was left to imagine that what was displayed was but the prelude to the future discovery of what was hidden of beauty in the rites of Paganism; he was not admitted to behold the wretched impostures, the loathsome orgies, the hideous incantations, the bloody human sacrifices perpetrated in secret, which made the foul, real substance of the fair exterior form. His first sight of the temple was not less successful in deceiving his eye than his first impression of the religion in deluding his mind.

With these hidden and guilty mysteries of the Pagan worship, the vault before which Ulpian now stood with his captives was intimately connected.

The human sacrifices offered among the Romans were of two kinds; those publicly and those privately performed. The first were of annual recurrence in the early years of the Republic; were prohibited at a later date; were revived by Augustus, who sacrificed his prisoners of war at the altar of Julius Caesar; and were afterwards--though occasionally renewed for particular purposes under some subsequent reigns--wholly abandoned as part of the ceremonies of Paganism during the later periods of the empire.

The sacrifices perpetrated in private were much longer practised. They were

connected with the most secret mysteries of the mythology; were concealed from the supervision of government; and lasted probably until the general extinction of heathen superstition in Italy and the provinces.

Many and various were the receptacles constructed for the private immolation of human victims in different parts of the empire--in its crowded cities as well as in its solitary woods--and among all, one of the most remarkable and the longest preserved was the great cavity pierced in the wall of the temple which Ulpian had chosen for his solitary lurking-place in Rome.

It was not merely as a place of concealment for the act of immolation, and for the corpse of the victim, that the vault had been built. A sanguinary artifice had complicated the manner of its construction, by placing in the cavity itself the instrument of the sacrifice; by making it, as it were, not merely the receptacle, but the devourer also of its human prey. At the bottom of the flight of steps leading down into it (the top of which, as we have already observed, was alone visible from the entrance in the temple recess) was fixed the image of a dragon formed in brass.

The body of the monster, protruding opposite the steps almost at a right angle from the wall, was moved in all directions by steel springs, which communicated with one of the lower stairs, and also with a sword placed in the throat of the image to represent the dragon's tongue. The walls around the steps narrowed so as barely to admit the passage of the human body when they approached the dragon. At the slightest pressure on the stair with which the spring communicated, the body of the monster bent forward, and the sword instantly protruded from its throat, at such a height from the steps as ensure that it should transfix in a vital part the person who descended. The corpse, then dropping by its own weight off the sword, fell through a tunnelled opening beneath the dragon, running downward in an opposite direction to that taken by the steps above, and was deposited on an iron grating washed by the waters of the Tiber, which ran under the arched foundations of the temple. The grating was approached by a secret subterranean passage leading from the front of the building, by which the sacrificing priests were enabled to reach the dead body, to fasten weights to it, and opening the grating, to drop it into the river, never to be beheld again by mortal eyes.

In the days when this engine of destruction was permitted to serve the purpose for which the horrible ingenuity of its inventors had constructed it, its principal victims were young girls. Crowned with flowers, and clad in white garments, they were lured into immolating themselves by being

furnished with rich offerings, and told that the sole object of their fatal expedition down the steps of the vault was to realise the pictures adorning its walls (which we have described a few pages back), by presenting their gifts at the shrine of the idol below.

At the period of which we write, the dragon had for many years--since the first prohibitions of Paganism--ceased to be fed with its wonted prey. The scales forming its body grew gradually corroded and loosened by the damp; and when moved by the wind which penetrated to them from beneath, whistling up in its tortuous course through the tunnel that ran in one direction below, and the vault of the steps that ascended in another above, produced the clashing sound which has been mentioned as audible at intervals from the mouth of the cavity. But the springs which moved the deadly apparatus of the whole machine being placed within it, under cover, continued to resist the slow progress of time and of neglect, and still remained as completely fitted as ever to execute the fatal purpose for which they had been designed.

The ultimate destiny of the dragon of brass was the destiny of the religion whose bloodiest superstitions it embodied: it fell beneath the resistless advance of Christianity. Shortly after the date of our narrative, the interior of the building beneath which it was placed having suffered from an accident, which will be related farther on, the exterior was dismantled, in order that its pillars might furnish materials for a church. The vault in the wall was explored by a monk who had been present at the destruction of other Pagan temples, and who volunteered to discover its contents. With a torch in one hand, and an iron bar in the other, he descended into the cavity, sounding the walls and the steps before him as he proceeded. For the first and the last time the sword protruded harmless from the monster's throat when the monk pressed the fatal stair, before stepping on it, with his iron bar. The same day the machine was destroyed and cast into the Tiber, where its victims had been thrown before it in former years.

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Some minutes have elapsed since we left the father and daughter standing by the Pagan's side before the mouth of the vault; and as yet there appears no change in the several positions of the three. But already, while Ulpius still looks down steadfastly into the cavity at his feet, his voice, as he continues to speak, grows louder, and his words become more distinct. Fearful recollections associated with the place are beginning to stir his weary memory, to lift the darkness of oblivion from his idle thoughts.

'They go down, far down there!' he abruptly exclaimed, pointing into the black depths of the vault, 'and never arise again to the light of the upper earth! The great Destroyer is watchful in his solitude beneath, and looks through the darkness for their approach! Hark! the hissing of his breath is like to the clash of weapons in a deadly strife!'

At this moment the wind moved the loose scales of the dragon. During an instant Ulpius remained silent, listening to the noise they produced. For the first time an expression of dread appeared on his face. His memory was obscurely reviving the incidents of his discovery of the deadly machinery in the vault when he first made his sojourn in the temple, when--filled with the confused remembrance of the mysterious rites and incantations, the secret sacrifices which he had witnessed and performed at Alexandria--he had found and followed the subterranean passage which led to the iron grating beneath the dragon. As the wind lulled again, and the clashing of the metal ceased with it, he began to give these recollections expression in words, uttering them in slow, solemn accents to himself.

'I have seen the Destroyer; the Invisible has revealed himself to me!' he murmured. 'I stood on the iron bars; the restless waters toiled and struggled beneath my feet as I looked up into the place of darkness. A voice called to me, "Get light, and behold me from above! Get light! get light!" Sun, and moon, and stars gave no light there! but lamps burnt in the city, in the houses of the dead, when I walked by them in the night-time; and the lamp gave light when sun, and moon, and stars gave none! From the top steps I looked down, and saw the Powerful One in his golden brightness; and approached not, but watched and listened in fear. The voice again!--the voice was heard again!--"Sacrifice to me in secret, as thy brethren sacrifice! Give me the living where the living are, and the dead where the dead!" The air came up cold, and the voice ceased, and the lamp was like sun, and moon, and stars--it gave no light in the place of darkness!'

While he spoke, the loose metal again clashed in the vault, for the wind was strengthening as the evening advanced. 'Hark! the signal to prepare the sacrifice!' cried the Pagan, turning abruptly to Numerian. 'Listen, bondman! the living and the dead are within our reach. The breath of the Invisible strikes them in the street and in the house; they stagger in the highways, and drop at the temple steps. When the hour comes we shall go forth and find them. Under my hand they go down into the cavern beneath. Whether they are hurled dead, or whether they go down living, they fall through to the iron bars, where the water leaps and rejoices to receive them! It is mine to sacrifice them above, and thine to wait for them below, to lift the bars and give them to the river to be swallowed up! The dead drop down first, the

living that are slain by the Destroyer follow after!

Here he paused suddenly. Now, for the first time, his eye rested on Antonina, whose very existence he seemed hitherto to have forgotten. A revolting smile of mingled cunning and satisfaction instantly changed the whole character of his countenance as he gazed on her and then looked round significantly to the vault. 'Here is one,' he whispered to Numerian, taking her by the arm. 'Keep her captive--the hour is near!'

Numerian had hitherto stood unheedful while he spoke; but when he touched Antonina the bare action was enough to arouse the father to resistance--hopeless though it was--once more. He shook off the grasp of Ulpius from the girl's arm, and drew back with her--breathless, vigilant, desperate--to the side-wall behind him.

The madman laughed in proud approval. 'My bondman obeys me and seizes the captive!' he cried. 'He remembers that the hour is near and loosens not his hold! Come,' he continued, 'come out into the hall beyond!--it is time that we watch for more victims for the sacrifice till the sun goes down. The Destroyer is mighty and must be obeyed!'

He walked to the entrance leading into the first apartment of the temple, and then waited to be followed by Numerian, who, now for the first time separated from Ulpius, remained stationary in the position he had last occupied, and looked eagerly around him. No chance of escape presented itself; the mouth of the vault on one side, and the passage through the partition on the other, were the only outlets to the place. There was no hope but to follow the Pagan into the great hall of the temple, to keep carefully at a distance from him, and to watch the opportunity of flight through the doorway. The street, so desolate when last beheld, might now afford more evidence that it was inhabited. Citizens, guards might be passing by, and might be summoned into the temple--help might be at hand.

As he moved forward with Antonina, such thoughts passed rapidly through the father's mind, unaccompanied at the moment by the recollection of the stranger who had followed them from the Pincian Gate, or of the apathy of the famished populace in aiding each other in any emergency. Seeing that he was followed as he had commanded, Ulpius passed on before them to the pile of idols; but a strange and sudden alteration appeared in his gait. He had hitherto walked with the step of a man--young, strong, and resolute of purpose; now he dragged one limb after the other as slowly and painfully as if he had received a mortal hurt. He tottered with more than the infirmity of his age, his head dropped upon his breast, and he moaned and murmured

inarticulately in low, long-drawn cries.

He had advanced to the side of the pile, half-way towards the doorway of the temple, when Numerian, who had watched with searching eyes the abrupt change in his demeanour, forgetting the dissimulation which might still be all-important, abandoned himself to his first impulse, and hurriedly pressing forward with Antonina, attempted to pass the Pagan and escape. But at the moment Ulpius stopped in his slow progress, reeled, threw out his hands convulsively, and seizing Numerian by the arm, staggered back with him against the side-wall of the temple. The fingers of the tortured wretch closed as if they were never to be unlocked again--closed as if with the clutch of death, with the last frantic grasp of a drowning man.

For days and nights past he had toiled incessantly under the relentless tyranny of his frenzy, building up higher and higher his altar of idols, and pouring forth his invocations before his gods in the place of the sacrifice; and now, at the moment when he was most triumphant in his ferocious activity of purpose, when his fancied bondman and his fancied victim were most helpless at his command--now, when his strained faculties were strung to their highest pitch, the long-deferred paroxysm had seized him, which was the precursor of his repose, of the only repose granted by his awful fate--a change (the mournful change already described) in the form of his insanity. For at those rare periods when he slept, his sleep was not unconsciousness, not rest: it was a trance of hideous dreams--his tongue spoke, his limbs moved, when he slumbered as when he woke. It was only when his visions of the pride, the power, the fierce conflicts, and daring resolutions of his maturer years gave place to his dim, quiet, waking dreams of his boyish days, that his wasted faculties reposed, and his body rested with them in the motionless languor of perfect fatigue. Then, if words were still uttered by his lips, they were as murmurs of an infant--happy sleep; for the innocent phrases of his childhood which they then revived, seemed for a time to bring with them the innocent tranquillity of his childhood as well.

'Go! go!--fly while you are yet free!' cried Numerian, dropping the hand of Antonina, and pointing to the door. But for the second time the girl refused to move forward a step. No horror, no peril in the temple could banish for an instant her remembrance of the night at the farm-house in the suburbs. She kept her head turned towards the vacant entrance, fixed her eyes on it in the unintermitting watchfulness of terror, and whispered affrightedly, 'Goisvintha! Goisvintha!' when her father spoke.

The clasp of the Pagan's fingers remained fixed and deathlike as at first; he leaned back against the wall, as still as if life and action had for ever

departed from him. The paroxysm had passed away; his face, distorted but the moment before, was now in repose, but it was a repose that was awful to look on. Tears rolled slowly from his half-closed eyes over his seamed and wrinkled cheeks--tears which were not the impressive expression of mental anguish (for a vacant and unchanging smile was on his lips), but the mere mechanical outburst of the physical weakness that the past crisis of agony had left behind it. Not the slightest appearance of thought or observation was perceptible in his features: his face was the face of an idiot.

Numerian, who had looked on him for an instant, shuddered and averted his eyes, recoiling from the sight before him. But a more overpowering trial of his resolution was approaching, which he could not avoid. Ere long the voice of Ulpus grew audible once more; but now its tones were weak, piteous, almost childish, and the words they uttered were quiet words of love and gentleness, which dropping from such lips, and pronounced in such a place, were fearful to hear. The temple and all that was in it vanished from his sight as from his memory. Swayed by the dread and supernatural influences of his disease, the madman passed back in an instant over the dark valley of life's evil pilgrimage to the long-quitted precincts of his boyish home. While in bodily presence he stood in the place of his last crimes, the outcast of reason and humanity, in mental consciousness he lay in his mother's arms, as he had lain there ere yet he had departed to the temple at Alexandria; and his heart communed with her heart, and his eyes looked on her as they had looked before his father's fatal ambition had separated for ever parent and child!

'Mother!--come back, mother!' he whispered. 'I was not asleep: I saw you when you came in, and sat by my bedside, and wept over me when you kissed me! Come back, and sit by me still! I am going away, far away, and may never hear your voice again! How happy we should be, mother, if I stayed with you always! But it is my father's will that I should go to the temple in another country, and live there to be a priest; and his will must be obeyed. I may never return; but we shall not forget one another! I shall remember your words when we used to talk together happily, and you shall still remember mine!'

Hardly had the first sentence been uttered by Ulpus when Antonina felt her father's whole frame suddenly tremble at her side. She turned her eyes from the doorway, on which they had hitherto been fixed, and looked on him. The Pagan's hand had fallen from his arm: he was free to depart, to fly as he had longed to fly but a few minutes before, and yet he never stirred. His daughter touched him, spoke to him, but he neither moved nor answered. It was not merely the shock of the abrupt transition in the language of Ulpus

from the ravings of crime to the murmurs of love--it was not merely astonishment at hearing from him, in his madness, revelations of his early life which had never passed his lips during his days of treacherous servitude in the house on the Pincian Hill, that thus filled Numerian's inmost soul with awe, and struck his limbs motionless. There was more in all that he heard than this. The words seemed as words that had doomed him at once and for ever. His eyes, directed full on the face of the madman, were dilated with horror, and his deep, gasping, convulsive breathings mingled heavily, during the moment of silence that ensued, with the chiming of the bells above and the bubbling of the water below--the lulling music of the temple, playing its happy evening hymn at the pleasant close of day.

'We shall remember, mother!--we shall remember!' continued the Pagan softly, 'and be happy in our remembrances! My brother, who loves me not, will love you when I am gone! You will walk in my little garden, and think on me as you look at the flowers that we have planted and watered together in the evening hours, when the sky was glorious to behold, and the earth was all quiet around us! Listen, mother, and kiss me! When I go to the far country, I will make a garden there like my garden here, and plant the same flowers that we have planted here, and in the evening I will go out and give them water at the hour when you go out to give my flowers water at home; and so, though we see each other no more, it will yet be as if we laboured together in the garden as we labour now!'

The girl still fixed her eager gaze on her father. His eyes presented the same rigid expression of horror; but he was now wiping off with his own hand, mechanically, as if he knew it not, the foam which the paroxysms had left round the madman's lips, and, amid the groans that burst from him, she could hear such words as, 'Lord God!--mercy, Lord God! Thou, who hast thus restored him to me--thus, worse than dead!--mercy! mercy!'

The light on the pavement beneath the portico of the temple was fading visibly--the sun had gone down.

For the third time the madman spoke, but his tones were losing their softness; they were complaining, plaintive, unutterably mournful; his dreams of the past were already changing. 'Farewell, brother--farewell for years and years!' he cried. 'You have not given me the love that I gave you. The fault was not mine that our father loved me the best, and chose me to be sent to the temple to be a priest at the altar of the gods! The fault was not mine that I partook not in your favoured sports, and joined not the companions whom you sought; it was our father's will that I should not live as you lived, and I obeyed it! You have spoken to me in anger, and turned

from me in disdain; but farewell again, Cleander--farewell in forgiveness and in love!

He might have spoken more, but his voice was drowned in one long shriek of agony which burst from Numerian's lips, and echoed discordantly through the hall of the temple, and he sank down with his face to the ground at the Pagan's feet. The dark and terrible destiny was fulfilled. The enthusiast for the right and the fanatic for the wrong; the man who had toiled to reform the Church, and the man who had toiled to restore the Temple; the master who had received and trusted the servant in his home, and the servant who in that home had betrayed the master's trust--the two characters, separated hitherto in the sublime disunion of good and bad, now struck together in tremendous contact, as brethren who had drawn their life from one source, who as children had been sheltered under the same roof!

Not in the hours when the good Christian succoured the then forsaken Pagan, wandering homeless in Rome, was the secret disclosed; no chance word of it was uttered when the deceiver told the feigned relation of his life to the benefactor whom he was plotting to deceive, or when, on the first morning of the siege, the machinations of the servant triumphed over the confidence of the master: it was reserved to be revealed in the words of delirium, at the closing years of madness, when he who discovered it was unconscious of all that he spoke, and his eyes were blinded to the true nature of all that he saw; when earthly voices that might once have called him back to repentance, to recognition, and to love, were become to him as sounds that have no meaning; when, by a ruthless and startling fatality, it was on the brother who had wrought for the true faith that the whole crushing weight of the terrible disclosure fell, unpartaken by the brother who had wrought for the false! But the judgments pronounced in Time go forth from the tribunal of that Eternity to which the mysteries of life tend, and in which they shall be revealed--neither waiting on human seasons nor abiding by human justice, but speaking to the soul in the language of immortality, which is heard in the world that is now, and interpreted in the world that is to come.

Lost, for an instant, even the recollection that Goisvintha might still be watching her opportunity from without, calling despairingly on her father, and vainly striving to raise him from the ground, Antonina remembered not, in the overwhelming trial of the moment, the revelations of Numerian's past life that had been disclosed to her in the days when the famine was at its worst in Rome. The name of 'Cleander', which she had then heard her father pronounce, as the name that he had abandoned when he separated himself from the companions of his sinful choice, passed unheeded by her

when the Pagan unconsciously uttered it. She saw the whole scene but as a fresh menace of danger, as a new vision of terror, more ominous of ill than all that had preceded it.

Thick as was the darkness in which the lulling and involuntary memories of the past had enveloped the perceptions of Ulpus, the father's piercing cry of anguish seemed to have penetrated it with a sudden ray of light. The madman's half-closed eyes opened instantly and fixed, dreamily at first, on the altar of idols. He waved his hands to and fro before him, as if he were parting back the folds of a heavy veil that obscured his sight; but his wayward thoughts did not resume as yet their old bias towards ferocity and crime. When he spoke again, his speech was still inspired by the visions of his early life--but now of his early life in the temple at Alexandria. His expressions were more abrupt, more disjointed than before; yet they continued to display the same evidence of the mysterious, instinctive vividness of recollection, which was the result of the sudden change in the nature of his insanity. His language wandered (still as if the words came from him undesignedly and unconsciously) over the events of his boyish introduction to the service of the gods, and, though confusing them in order, still preserved them in substance, as they have been already related in the history of his 'apprenticeship to the temple'.

Now he was in imagination looking down once more from the summit of the Temple of Serapis on the glittering expanse of the Nile and the wide country around it; and now he was walking proudly through the streets of Alexandria by the side of his uncle, Macrinus, the high priest. Now he was wandering at night, in curiosity and awe, through the gloomy vaults and subterranean corridors of the sacred place; and now he was listening, well pleased, to the kindly greeting, the inspiring praises of Macrinus during their first interview. But at this point, and while dwelling on this occasion, his memory became darkened again; it vainly endeavoured to retrace the circumstances attending the crowning evidence of the high priest's interest in his pupil, and anxiety to identify him completely with his new protector and his new duties, which had been displayed when he conferred on the trembling boy the future distinction of one of his own names.

And here, let it be remembered, as a chief link in the mysterious chain of fatalities which had united to keep the brothers apart as brethren after they had met as men, that both had, from widely different causes, abandoned in after-life the names which they bore in their father's house; that while one, by his own act and for his own purpose, transformed himself from Cleander, the associate of the careless and the criminal, to Numerian, the preacher of the Gospel and reformer of the Church, the other had (to quote the words of

the fourth chapter), 'become from the boy Emilius the student Ulpius,' by the express and encouraging command of his master, Macrinus, the high priest.

While the Pagan still fruitlessly endeavoured to revive the events connected with the change in his designation on his arrival in Alexandria, and, chafing under the burden of oblivion that weighed upon his thoughts, attempted for the first time to move from the wall against which he had hitherto leaned; while Antonina still strove in vain to recall her father to the recollection of the terrible exigencies of the moment as he crouched prostrate at the madman's feet--the doorway of the temple was darkened once more by the figure of Goisvintha. She stood on the threshold, a gloomy and indistinct form in the fading light, looking intently into the deeply shadowed interior of the building. As she marked the altered positions of the father and daughter, she uttered a suppressed ejaculation of triumph; but, while the sound passed her lips, she heard, or thought she heard, a noise in the street behind. Even now her vigilance and cunning, her deadly, calculating resolution to await in immovable patience the fitting time for striking the blow deliberately and with impunity, did not fail her. Turning instantly, she walked to the top step of the temple, and stood there for a few moments, watchfully surveying the open space before her.

But in those few moments the scene in the building changed once more. The madman, while he still wavered between relapsing into the raving fit and continuing under the influence of the tranquil mood in which he had been prematurely disturbed, caught sight of Goisvintha when her approach suddenly shadowed the entrance to the temple. Her presence, momentary though it was, was for him the presence of a figure that had not appeared before; that had stood in a strange position between the shade within and the faint light without; it was a new object, presented to his eyes while they were straining to recover such imperfect faculties of observation as had been their wont, and its ascendancy over him was instantaneous and all-powerful.

He started, bewildered like a deep sleeper suddenly awoke; violent shudderings ran for a moment over his frame; then it strengthened again with its former unnatural strength; the demon raged within him in renewed fury as he tore his robe which Numerian held as he lay at his feet from the feeble grasp that confined it, and, striding up to the pile of idols, stretched out his hands in solemn deprecation. 'The high priest has slept before the altar of the gods!' he cried loudly, 'but they have been patient with their well-beloved; their thunder has not struck him for his crime! Now the servant returns to his service--the rites of Serapis begin!'

Numerian still remained prostrate, spirit-broken; he slowly clasped his hands together on the floor, and his voice was now to be heard, still supplicating in low and stifled accents, as if in unceasing prayer lay his last hope of preserving his own reason. 'God! Thou art the God of Mercy; be merciful to him!' he murmured. 'Thou acceptest of repentance; grant repentance to him! If at any time I have served Thee without blame, let the service be counted to him; let the vials of Thy wrath be poured out on me!'

'Hark! the trumpet blows for the sacrifice!' interrupted the raving voice of the Pagan, as he turned from the altar, and extended his arms in frenzied inspiration. 'The roar of music and the voice of exultation soar upward from the highest mountain-tops! The incense smokes, and in and out, and round and round, the dancers whirl about the pillars of the temple! The ox for the sacrifice is without spot; his horns are gilt; the crown and fillet adorn his head. The priest stands before him naked from the waist upwards; he heaves the libation out of the cup; the blood flows over the altar! Up! up! tear forth with reeking hands the heart while it is yet warm, futurity is before you in the quivering entrails, look on them and read! read!'

While he spoke, Goisvintha had entered the temple. The street was still desolate; no help was at hand.

Not advancing at once, she concealed herself near the door behind a projection in the pile of idols, watching from it until Ulpius, in the progress of his frenzy, should turn away from Antonina, whom he stood fronting at this instant. But she had not entered unperceived; Antonina had seen her again. And now the bitterness of death, when the young die unprotected in their youth, came over the girl, and she cried in a low wailing voice, as she knelt by Numerian's side: 'I must die, father, I must die, as Hermanric died! Look up at me, and speak to me before I die!'

Her father was still praying; he heard nothing, for his heart was bleeding in atonement at the shrine of his boyish home, and his soul still communed with its Maker. The voice that followed hers was the voice of Ulpius.

'Oh, beautiful are the gardens round the sacred altars, and lofty the trees that embower the glittering shrines!' he exclaimed, rapt and ecstatic in his new visions. 'Lo, the morning breaks, and the spirits of light are welcomed by a sacrifice! The sun goes down behind the mountain, and the beams of evening tremble on the victim beneath the knife of the adoring priest! The moon and stars shine high in the firmament, and the Genii of Nights are saluted in the still hours with blood!'

As he paused, the lament of Antonina was continued in lower and lower tones: 'I must die, father, I must die!' And with it murmured the supplicating accents of Numerian: 'God of Mercy! deliver the helpless and forgive the afflicted! Lord of Judgment! deal gently with Thy servants who have sinned!' While, mingling with both in discordant combination, the strange music of the temple still poured on its lulling sound--the rippling of the running waters and the airy chiming of the bells!

'Worship!--emperors, armies, nations, glorify and worship me!' shouted the madman, in thunder-tones of triumph and command, as his eye for the first time encountered the figure of Numerian prostrate at his feet. 'Worship the demi-god who moves with the deities through spheres unknown to man! I have heard the moans of the unburied who wander on the shores of the Lake of the Dead--worship! I have looked on the river whose black current roars and howls in its course through the caves of everlasting night--worship! I have seen the furies lashed by serpents on their wrinkled necks, and followed them as they hurled their torches over the pining ghosts! I have stood unmoved in the hurricane-tumult of hell--worship! worship! worship!'

He turned round again towards the altar of idols, calling upon his gods to proclaim his deification, and at the moment when he moved, Goisvintha sprang forward. Antonina was kneeling with her face turned from the door, as the assassin seized her by her long hair and drove the knife into her neck. The moaning accents of the girl, bewailing her approaching fate, closed in one faint groan; she stretched out her arms, and fell forward over her father's body.

In the ferocious triumph of the moment, Goisvintha raised her arm to repeat the stroke; but at that instant the madman looked round. 'The sacrifice--the sacrifice!' he shouted, leaping at one spring like a wild beast at her throat. She struck ineffectually at him with the knife, as he fastened his long nails in her flesh and hurled her backwards to the floor. Then he yelled and gibbered in frantic exultation, set his foot on her breast, and spat on her as she lay beneath him.

The contact of the girl's body when she fell--the short but terrible tumult of the attack that passed almost over him--the shrill, deafening cries of the madman, awoke Numerian from his trance of despairing remembrance, aroused him in his agony of supplicating prayer. He looked up.

The scene that met his eyes was one of those scenes which crush every faculty but the faculty of mechanical action--before which, thought vanishes

from men's minds, utterance is suspended on their lips, expression is paralysed on their faces. The coldness of the tomb seemed breathed over Numerian's aspect by the contemplation of the terrible catastrophe: his eyes were glassy and vacant, his lips parted and rigid; even the remembrance of the discovery of his brother seemed lost to him as he stooped over his daughter and bound a fragment of her robe round her neck. The mute, soulless, ghastly stillness of death looked settled on his features, as, unconscious now of weakness or age, he rose with her in his arms, stood motionless for one moment before the doorway, and looked slowly round on Ulpius; then he moved forward with heavy regular steps. The Pagan's foot was still on Goisvintha's breast as the father passed him; his gaze was still fixed on her; but his cries of triumph were calmed; he laughed and muttered incoherently to himself.

The moon was rising, soft, faint, and tranquil, over the quiet street as Numerian descended the temple steps with his daughter in his arms, and, after an instant's pause of bewilderment and doubt, instinctively pursued his slow, funereal course along the deserted roadway in the direction of home. Soon, as he advanced, he beheld in the moonlight, down the long vista of the street at its termination, a little assemblage of people walking towards him with calm and regular progress. As they came nearer, he saw that one of them held an open book, that another carried a crucifix, and that others followed these two with clasped hands and drooping heads. And then, after an interval, the fresh breezes that blew towards him bore onward these words, slowly and reverently pronounced:--

'Know, therefore, that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth.

'Canst thou, by searching, find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection?'

Then the breeze fell, the words grew indistinct, but the procession still moved forward. As it came nearer and nearer, the voice of the reader was again plainly heard:--

'If iniquity be in thy hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles.

'For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be steadfast, and shalt not fear;

'Because thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass

away:

And thine age shall be clearer than the noonday; thou shalt shine forth,
thou shalt be as the morning.'

The reader stopped and closed the book; for now Numerian had met the members of the little procession, and they looked on him standing voiceless before them in the clear moonlight, with his daughter's head drooping over his shoulder as he carried her in his arms.

There were some among those who gathered round him whose features he would have recognised at another time as the features of the surviving adherents of his former congregation. The assembly he had met was composed of the few sincere Christians in Rome, who had collected, on the promulgation of the news that Alaric had ratified terms of peace, to make a pilgrimage through the city, in the hopeless endeavour, by reading from the Bible and passing exhortation, to awaken the reckless populace to a feeling of contrition for their sins, and of devout gratitude for their approaching deliverance from the horrors of the siege.

But now, when Numerian confronted them, neither by word nor look did he express the slightest recognition of any who surrounded him. To all the questions addressed to him, he replied by hurried gestures that none could comprehend. To all the promises of help and protection heaped upon him in the first outbreak of the grief and pity of his adherents of other days, he answered but by the same dull, vacant glance. It was only when they relieved him of his burden, and gently prepared to carry the senseless girl among them back to her father's house, that he spoke; and then, in faint entreating tones, he besought them to let him hold her hand as they went, so that he might be the first to feel her pulse beat--if it yet moved.

They turned back by the way they had come--a sorrowful and slow-moving procession! As they passed on, the reader again opened the Sacred Book; and then these words rose through the soothing and heavenly tranquillity of the first hours of night:--

'Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty:

'For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole.'