

The Emperor — Volume 08 eBook

The Emperor — Volume 08 by Georg Ebers

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Contents

The Emperor — Volume 08 eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	4
Page 1.....	5
Page 2.....	6
Page 3.....	8
Page 4.....	10
Page 5.....	12
Page 6.....	14
Page 7.....	16
Page 8.....	18
Page 9.....	20
Page 10.....	21
Page 11.....	22
Page 12.....	24
Page 13.....	26
Page 14.....	27
Page 15.....	29
Page 16.....	30
Page 17.....	31
Page 18.....	32
Page 19.....	33
Page 20.....	35
Page 21.....	36
Page 22.....	38

Page 23.....	40
Page 24.....	42
Page 25.....	43
Page 26.....	45
Page 27.....	47
Page 28.....	49
Page 29.....	51
Page 30.....	53
Page 31.....	55
Page 32.....	57
Page 33.....	58
Page 34.....	60
Page 35.....	61
Page 36.....	63
Page 37.....	65
Page 38.....	67
Page 39.....	68
Page 40.....	70

Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
CHAPTER X.		1
CHAPTER XI.		11
CHAPTER XII.		20
CHAPTER XIII.		27
ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:		35
Information about Project Gutenberg (one page)		36
(Three Pages)		37

Page 1

CHAPTER X.

The story told by Mastor which had so greatly agitated Pollux and had prompted him to his mad flight was the history of events which had taken place in the steward's rooms during the hours when the young artist was helping his parents to transfer their household belongings into his sister's tiny dwelling. Keraunus was certainly not one of the most cheerful of men, but on the morning when Sabina came to the palace and the gate-keeper was driven from his home, he had worn the aspect of a thoroughly-contented man.

Since visiting Selene the day before he had given himself no farther concern about her. She was not dangerously ill and was exceptionally well taken care of, and the children did not seem to miss her. Indeed, he himself did not want her back to-day. He avoided confessing this to himself it is true, still he felt lighter and freer in the absence of his grave monitor than he had been for a long time. It would be delightful, he thought, to go on living in this careless manner, alone with Arsinoe and the children, and now and again he rubbed his hands and grinned complacently. When the old slave-woman brought a large dish full of cakes which he had desired her to buy, and set it down by the side of the children's porridge, he chuckled so heartily that his fat person shook and swayed; and he had very good reason to be happy in his way, for Plutarch quite early in the morning, had sent a heavy purse of gold pieces for his ivory cup, and a magnificent bunch of roses to Arsinoe; he might give his children a treat, buy himself a solid gold fillet, and dress Arsinoe as finely as though she were the prefect's favorite daughter.

His vanity was gratified in every particular.

And what a splendid fellow was the slave who now—with a superbly reverential bow-presented him with a roast chicken and who was to walk behind him in the afternoon to the council-chamber. The tall Thessalian who marched after the Archidikastes to the Hall of justice, carrying his papers, was hardly grander than his "body-servant." He had bought him yesterday at quite a low price. The well-grown Samian was scarcely thirty years old; he could read and write and was in a position therefore to instruct the children in these arts; nay, he could even play the lute. His past, to be sure, was not a spotless record, and it was for that reason that he had been sold so cheaply. He had stolen things on several occasions; but the brands and scars which he bore upon his person were hidden by his new chiton and Keraunus felt in himself the power to cure him of his evil propensities.

After desiring Arsinoe to let nothing he about of any value, for their new house-mate seemed not to be perfectly honest, he answered his daughter's scruples by saying:

Page 2

"It would be better, no doubt, that he should be as honest as the old skeleton I gave in exchange for him, but I reflect that even if my body-servant should make away with some of the few drachmae we carry about with us, I need not repent of having bought him, since I got him for many thousand drachmae less than he is worth, on account of his thefts, while a teacher for the children would have cost more than he can steal from us at the worst. I will lock up the gold in the chest with my documents. It is strong and could only be opened with a crow-bar. Besides the fellow will have left off stealing at any rate at first, for his late master was none of the mildest and had cured him of his pilfering I should think, once for all. It is lucky that in selling such rascals we should be compelled to state what their faults are; if the seller fails to do so compensation maybe claimed from him by the next owner for what he may lose. Lykophron certainly concealed nothing, and setting aside his thieving propensities the Samian is said to be in every respect a capital fellow."

But father," replied Arsinoe, her anxiety once more urging her to speak, "it is a bad thing to have a dishonest man in the house."

"You know nothing about it child!" answered Keraunus. "To us to live and to be honest are the same thing, but a slave!—King Antiochus is said to have declared that the man who wishes to be well served must employ none but rascals."

When Arsinoe had been tempted out on to the balcony by her lover's snatch of song and had been driven in again by her father, the steward had not reproved her in any way unkindly, but had stroked her cheeks and said with a smile: "I rather fancy that lad of the gatekeeper's—whom I once turned out of doors has had his eye on you since you were chosen for Roxana. Poor wretch! But we have very different suitors in view for you my little girl. How would it be, think you, if rich Plutarch had sent you those roses, not on his own behalf but as a greeting on the part of his son? I know that he is very desirous of marrying him but the fastidious man has never yet thought any Alexandrian girl good enough for him."

"I do not know him, and he does not think of a poor thing like me," said Arsinoe.

"Do you think not?" asked Keraunus smiling. "We are of as good family, nay of a better than Plutarch, and the fairest is a match for the wealthiest. What would you say child to a long flowing purple robe and a chariot with white horses, and runners in front?"

At breakfast Keraunus drank two cups of strong wine, in which he allowed Arsinoe to mix only a few drops of water. While his daughter was curling his hair a swallow flew into the room; this was a good omen and raised the steward's spirits. Dressed in his best and with a well-filled purse, he was on the point of starting for the council-chamber with his new slave when Sophilus the tailor and his girl-assistant were shown into the living-room. The man begged to be allowed to try the dress, ordered for Roxana by the prefect's wife, on the steward's daughter. Keraunus received him with much

condescension and allowed him to bring in the slave who followed him with a large parcel of dresses,—and Arsinoe, who was with the children, was called.

Page 3

Arsinoe was embarrassed and anxious and would far rather have yielded her part to another; still, she was curious about the new dresses. The tailor begged her to allow her maid to dress her; his assistant would help her because the dresses which were only slightly stitched together for trying on, were cut, not in the Greek but in the Oriental fashion.

"Your waiting woman," he added turning to Arsinoe, "will be able to learn to-day the way to dress you on the great occasion."

"My daughter's maid," said Keraunus, winking slyly at Arsinoe, "is not in the house."

"Oh, I require no help," cried the tailor's girl. "I am handy too at dressing hair, and I am most glad to help such a fair Roxana."

"And it is a real pleasure to work for her," added Sophilus. "Other young ladies are beautified by what they wear, but your daughter adds beauty to all she wears."

"You are most polite," said Keraunus, as Arsinoe and her handmaid left the room.

"We learn a great deal by our intercourse with people of rank," replied the tailor. "The illustrious ladies who honor me with their custom like not only to see but to hear what is pleasing. Unfortunately there are among them some whom the gods have graced with but few charms, and they, strangely enough, crave the most flattering speeches. But the poor always value it more than the rich when benevolence is shown them."

"Well said," cried Keraunus. "I myself am but indifferently well off for a man of family, and am glad to live within my moderate means—so that my daughter—"

"The lady Julia has chosen the costliest stuffs for her; as is fitting— as the occasion demands," said the tailor. "Quite right, at the same time—"

"Well, my lord?"

"The grand occasion will be over and my daughter, now that she is grown up, ought to be seen at home and in the street in suitable and handsome, though not costly, clothes.

"I said just now, true beauty needs no gaudy raiment."

"Would you be disposed now, to work for me at a moderate price?"

"With pleasure; nay, I shall be indebted to her, for all the world will admire Roxana and inquire who may be her tailor."

"You are a very reasonable and right-minded man. What now would you charge for a dress for her?"

“That we can discuss later.”

“No, no, I beg you sincerely—”

“First let me consider what you want. Simple dresses are more difficult, far more difficult to make, and yet become a handsome woman better than rich and gaudy robes. But can any man make a woman understand it? I could tell you a tale of their folly! Why many a woman who rides by in her chariot wears dresses and gems to conceal not merely her own limbs, but the poverty-stricken condition of her house.”

Page 4

Thus, and in this wise did Keraunus and the tailor converse, while the assistant plaited up Arsinoe's hair with strings of false pearls that she had brought with tier, and fitted and pinned on her the costly white and blue silk robes of an Asiatic princess. At first Arsinoe was very still and timid. She no longer cared to dress for any one but Pollux; but the garments prepared for her were wonderfully pretty—and how well the fitter knew how to give effect to her natural advantages. While the neat-handed woman worked busily and carefully many merry jests passed between them—many sincere and hearty words of admiration—and before long Arsinoe had become quite excited and took pleased interest in the needle-woman's labors.

Every bough that is freshly decked by spring seems to feel gladness, and the simple child who was to-day so splendidly dressed was captivated by pleasure in her own beauty, and its costly adornment which delighted her beyond measure. Arsinoe now clapped her hands with delight, now had the mirror handed to her, and now, with all the frankness of a child, expressed her satisfaction not only with the costly clothes she wore, but with her own surprisingly grand appearance in them.

The dress-maker was enchanted with her, proud and delighted, and could not resist the impulse to give a kiss to the charming girl's white, beautifully round throat.

"If only Pollux could see me so!" thought Arsinoe. "After the performance perhaps I might show myself in my dress to Selene, and then she would forgive my taking part in the show. It is really a pleasure to look so nice!"

The children all stood round her while she was being dressed, and shouted with admiration each time some new detail of the princess's attire was added. Helios begged to be allowed to feel her dress, and after satisfying herself that his little hands were clean she stroked them over the glistening white silk.

She had now advanced so far that her father and the tailor could be called in. She felt remarkably content and happy. Drawn up to her tallest, like a real king's daughter, and yet with a heart beating as anxiously as that of any girl would who is on the point of displaying her beauty—hitherto protected and hidden in her parents' home—to the thousand eyes of the gaping multitude, she went towards the sitting-room; but she drew back her hand she had put forth to raise the latch, for she heard the voices of several men who must just now have joined her father.

"Wait a little while, there are visitors," she cried to the seamstress who had followed her, and she put her ear to the door to listen. At first she could not make out anything that was going on, but the end of the strange conversation that was being carried on within was so hideously intelligible that she could never forget it so long as she lived.

Her father had ordered two new dresses for her, beating down the price with the promise of prompt payment, when Mastor came into the steward's room and informed

Keraunus that his master and Gabinius, the curiosity-dealer from Nicaea, wished to speak with him.

Page 5

"Your master," said Keraunus haughtily, "may come in; I think that he regrets the injury he has done me; but Gabinius shall never cross this threshold again, for he is a scoundrel."

"It would be as well that you should desire that man to leave you for the present," said the slave, pointing to the tailor.

"Whoever comes to visit me," said the steward loftily, "must be satisfied to meet any one whom I permit to enter my house."

"Nay, nay," said the slave urgently, "my master is a greater man than you think. Beg this man to leave the room."

"I know, I know very well," said Keraunus with a smile. "Your master is an acquaintance of Caesar's. But we shall see, after the performance that is about to take place, which of us two Caesar will decide for. This tailor has business here and will stay at my pleasure. Sit in the corner there, my friend."

"A tailor!" cried Mastor, horrified. "I tell you he must go."

"He must!" asked Keraunus wrathfully. "A slave dares to give orders in my house? We will see."

"I am going," interrupted the artisan who understood the case. "No unpleasantness shall arise here on my account, I will return in a quarter of an hour."

"You will stay," commanded Keraunus. "This insolent Roman seems to think that Lochias belongs to him; but I will show him who is master here."

But Mastor paid no heed to these words spoken in a high pitch; he took the tailor's hand and led him out, whispering to him:

"Come with me if you wish to escape an evil hour."

The two men went off and Keraunus did not detain the artisan, for it occurred to his mind that his presence did him small credit. He purposed to show himself in all his dignity to the overbearing architect, but he also remembered that it was not advisable to provoke unnecessarily the mysterious bearded stranger, with the big clog. Much excited, and not altogether free from anxiety, he paced up and down his room. To give himself courage he hastily filled a cup from the wine-jar that stood on the breakfast table, emptied it, refilled it and drank it off a second time without adding any water, and then stood with his arms folded and a strong color in his face awaiting his enemy's visit.

The Emperor walked in with Gabinius. Keraunus expected some greeting, but Hadrian spoke not a word, cast a glance at him of the utmost contempt and passed by him

without taking any more notice of him than if he had been a pillar or a piece of furniture. The blood mounted to the steward's head and heated his eyes and for fully a minute he strove in vain to find words to give utterance to his rage. Gabinius paid no more heed to Keraunus than the Roman had done. He walked on ahead and paused in front of the mosaic for which he had offered so high a price, and over which a few days since he had been so sharply dealt with by the steward.

Page 6

"I would beg you," he said, "to look at this masterpiece."

The Emperor looked at the ground, but hardly had he begun to study the picture, of which he quite understood and appreciated the beauty, when just behind him he heard in a hoarse voice these words uttered with difficulty:

"In Alexandria—it is the custom, to greet—to say something—to the people you visit." Hadrian half turned his head towards the speaker and said indifferently but with strong and insulting contempt:

"In Rome too it is the custom to greet honest people." Then looking down again at the mosaic he said, "Exquisite, exquisite an inestimable and precious work." At Hadrian's words Keraunus' eyes almost started out of his head. His face was crimson and his lips pale; he went close up to him and as soon as he had found breath to speak he said:

"What have you—what are your words intended to convey?"

Hadrian turned suddenly and full upon the steward; in his eyes sparkled that annihilating fire which few could endure to gaze on and his deep voice rolled sullenly through the room as he said to the miserable man:

"My words are intended to convey that you have been an unfaithful steward, that I know what you would rather I should not know, that I have learned how you deal with the property entrusted to you, that you—"

"That I?"—cried the steward trembling with rage and stepping close up to the Emperor.

"That you," shouted Hadrian in his face, "tried to sell this picture to this man; in short that you are a simpleton and a scoundrel into the bargain."

"I—I," gasped Keraunus slapping his hand on his fat chest. "I—a—a— but you shall repent of these words."

Hadrian laughed coldly and scornfully, but Keraunus sprang on Gabinius with a wonderful agility for his size, clutched him by the collar of his chiton and shook the feeble little man as if he were a sapling, shrieking meanwhile:

"I will choke you with your own lies—serpent, mean viper!"

"Madman!" cried Hadrian "leave hold of the Ligurian or by Sirius you shall repent it."

"Repent it?" gasped the steward. "It will be your turn to repent when Caesar comes. Then will come a day of reckoning with false witnesses, shameless calumniators who disturb peaceful households, while credulous idiots—"

“Man, man,” interrupted Hadrian, not loudly but sternly and ominously, “you know not to whom you speak.”

“Oh I know you—I know you only too well. But I—I—shall I tell you who I am?”

“You—you are a blockhead,” replied the monarch shrugging his shoulders contemptuously. Then he added calmly, with dignity—almost with indifference:

“I am Caesar.”

At these words the steward’s hand dropped from the chiton of the half-throttled dealer. Speechless and with a glassy stare he gazed in Hadrian’s face for a few seconds. Then he suddenly started, staggered backwards, uttered a loud choking, gurgling, nameless cry, and fell back on the floor like a mass of rock shaken from its foundations by an earthquake. The room shook again with his fall.

Page 7

Hadrian was startled and when he saw him lying motionless at his feet he bent over him—less from pity than from a wish to see what was the matter with him; for he had also dabbled in medicine. Just as he was lifting the fallen man's hand to feel his pulse Arsinoe rushed into the room. She had heard the last words of the antagonists with breathless anxiety and her father's fall and now threw herself on her knees by the side of the unhappy man, just opposite to Hadrian, and as his distorted and grey-white face told her what had occurred she broke out in a passionate cry of anguish. Her brothers and sisters followed at her heels, and when they saw their favorite sister bewailing herself they followed her example without knowing at first what Arsinoe was crying for, but soon with terror and horror at their father lying there stiff and disfigured. The Emperor, who had never had either son or daughter of his own, found nothing so intolerable as the presence of crying children. However he endured the wailing and whimpering that surrounded him till he had ascertained the condition of the man lying on the ground before him.

"He is dead," he said in a few minutes. "Cover his face, Master."

Arsinoe and the children broke out afresh, and Hadrian glanced down at them with annoyance. When his eye fell on Arsinoe, whose costly robe, merely pinned and slightly stitched together had come undone with the vehemence of her movements and were hanging as flapping rags in tumbled disorder, he was disgusted with the gaudy fluttering trumpery which contrasted so painfully with the grief of the wearer, and turning his back on the fair girl he quitted the chamber of misery.

Gabinus followed him with a hideous smirk. He had directed the Emperor's attention to the mosaic pavement in the steward's room, and had shamelessly accused Keraunus of having offered to sell him a work that belonged to the palace, contrasting his conduct with his own rectitude. Now the calumniated man was dead, and the truth could never come to light; this was necessarily a satisfaction to the miserable man, but he derived even greater pleasure from the reflection that Arsinoe could not now fill the part of Roxana, and that consequently there was once more a possibility that it might devolve on his daughter.

Hadrian walked on in front of him, silent and thoughtful. Gabinus followed him into his writing-room, and there said with fulsome smoothness:

"Ah, great Caesar, thus do the gods punish with a heavy hand the crimes of the guilty."

Hadrian did not interrupt him, but he looked him keenly and enquiringly in the face, and then said, gravely, but coolly:

"It seems to me, man, that I should do well to break off my connection with you, and to give some other dealer the commissions which I proposed to entrust to you."

“Caesar!” stammered Gabinius, “I really do not know—”

“But I do know,” interrupted the Emperor. “You have attempted to mislead me, and throw your own guilt on the shoulders of another.”

Page 8

"I—great Caesar? I have attempted—" began the Ligurian, while his pinched features turned an ashy grey. "You accused the steward of a dishonorable trick," replied Hadrian. "But I know men well, and I know that no thief ever yet died of being called a scoundrel. It is only undeserved disgrace that can cost a man's life."

"Keraunus was full-blooded, and the shock when he learnt that you were Caesar—"

"That shock accelerated the end no doubt," interrupted the monarch, "but the mosaic in the steward's room is worth a million of sesterces, and now I have seen enough to be quite sure that you are not the man to save your money when a work like that mosaic is offered you for sale—be the circumstances what they may. If I see the case rightly, it was Keraunus who refused your demand that he should resign to you the treasure in his charge. Certainly, that was the case exactly! Now, leave me. I wish to be alone."

Gabinus retired with many bows, walking backwards to the door, and then turned his back on the palace of Lochias muttering many impotent curses as he went.

The steward's new 'body-servant,' the old black woman, Mastor, the tailor and his slave, helped Arsinoe to carry her father's lifeless body and lay it on a couch, and the slave closed his eyes. He was dead—so each told the despairing girl, but she would not, could not believe it. As soon as she was alone with the old negress and the dead, she lifted up his heavy, clumsy arm, and as soon as she let go her hold it fell by his side like lead. She lifted the cloth from the dead man's face, but she flung it over him again at once, for death had drawn his features. Then she kissed his cold hand and brought the children in and made them do the same, and said sobbing:

"We have no father now; we shall never, never see him again."

The little blind boy felt the dead body with his hands, and asked his sister:

"Will he not wake again to-morrow morning and make you curl his hair, and take me up on his knee?"

"Never, never; he is gone, gone for ever."

As she spoke Mastor entered the room, sent by his master. Yesterday had he not heard from the overseer of the pavement-workers the comforting tidings that after our grief and suffering here on earth there would be another, beautiful, blissful and eternal life? He went kindly up to Arsinoe and said:

"No, no, my children; when we are dead we become beautiful angels with colored wings, and all who have loved each other here on earth will meet again in the presence of the good God."

Arsinoe looked at the slave with disapproval.

“What is the use,” she asked, “of cheating the children with silly tales? Their father is gone, quite gone, but we will never, never forget him.”

“Are there any angels with red wings?” asked the youngest little girl.

“Oh! I want to be an angel!” cried Helios, clapping his hands. “And can the angels see?”

Page 9

“Yes, dear little man,” replied Mastor, “and their eyes are wonderfully bright, and all they look upon is beautiful.”

“Tell them no more Christian nonsense,” begged Arsinoe. “Ah! children, when we shall have burned our father’s body there will be nothing left of him but a few grey ashes.”

But the slave took the little blind boy on his knees and whispered to him:

“Only believe what I tell you—you will see him again in Heaven.”

Then he set him down again, gave Arsinoe a little bag of gold pieces in Caesar’s name, and begged her—for so his master desired—to find a new abode and, after the deceased was burned on the morrow, to quit Lochias with the children. When Mastor was gone Arsinoe opened the chest, in which lay her father’s papyri and the money that Plutarch had paid for the ivory cup, put in the heavy purse sent by the Emperor, comforting herself while her tears flowed, with the reflection that she and the children were provided at any rate against immediate want.

But where was she to go with the little ones? Where could she hope to find a refuge at once? What was to become of them when all they now possessed was spent. The gods be thanked! she was not forlorn; she still had friends. She could find protection and love with Pollux and look to dame Doris for motherly counsel.

She quickly dried her eyes and changed the remains of her splendor for the dark dress in which she was accustomed to work at the papyrus factory; then, as soon as she had taken the pearls out of her hair, she went down to the little gate-house.

She was only a few steps from the door—but why did not the Graces come springing out to meet her? Why did she see no birds, no flowers in the window? Was she deceived, was she dreaming or was she tricked by some evil spirit? The door of the dear home-like little dwelling was wide open and the sitting-room was absolutely empty, not a chattel was left behind, forgotten—not a leaf from a plant was lying on the ground; for dame Doris, in her tidy fashion, had swept out the few rooms where she had grown grey in peace and contentment as carefully as though she were to come into them again to-morrow.

What had happened here? Where were her friends gone? A great terror came over her, all the misery of desolation fell upon her, and as she sank upon the stone bench outside the gate-house to wait for the inhabitants who must presently return, the tears again flowed from her eyes and fell in heavy drops on her hands as they lay in her lap.

Page 10

She was still sitting there, thinking with a throbbing heart of Pollux and of the happy morning of this now dying day, when a troupe of Moorish slaves came towards the deserted house. The head mason who led them desired her to rise from the bench, and in answer to her questions, told her that the little building was to be pulled down, and that the couple who had inhabited it were evicted from their post, turned out of doors and had gone elsewhere with all their belongings. But where Doris and her son had taken themselves no one knew. Arsinoe as she heard these tidings felt like a sailor whose vessel has grounded on a rocky shore, and who realizes with horror that every plank and beam be neath him quivers and gapes. As usual, when she felt too weak to help herself unaided, her first thought was of Selene, and she decided to hasten off to her and to ask her what she could do, what was to become of her and the children.

It was already growing dark. With a swift step, and drying her eyes from time to time on her peplum as she went, she returned to her own room to fetch a veil, without which she dared not venture so late into the streets. On the steps—where the dog had thrown down Selene—she met a man hurrying past her; in the dim light she fancied he bore some resemblance to the slave that her father had bought the day before; but she paid no particular heed, for her mind was full of so many other things. In the kitchen sat the old negress in front of a lamp and the children squatted round her; by the hearth sat the baker and the butcher, to whom her father owed considerable sums and who had come to claim their dues, for ill news has swifter wings than good tidings, and they had already heard of the steward's death. Arsinoe took the lamp, begged the men to wait, went into the sitting-room, passing, not without a shudder, the body of the man who a few hours since had stroked her cheeks and looked lovingly into her eyes.

How glad she felt to be able to pay her dead father's debts and save the honor of his name! She confidently drew the key out of her pocket and went up to the chest. What was this? She knew, quite positively, that she had locked it before going out and yet it was now standing wide open; the lid, thrown back, hung askew by one hinge; the other was broken. A dread, a hideous suspicion, froze her blood; the lamp trembled in her hand as she leaned over the chest which ought to have contained every thing she possessed. There lay the old documents, carefully rolled together, side by side, but the two bags with Plutarch's money and the Emperor's, had vanished. She took out one roll after another; then she tossed them all out on to the floor till the bottom of the chest was bare—but the gold was really gone, nowhere to be found.

The new slave had forced open the lid of the chest and stolen the whole possessions of the orphans of the man who, to gratify his own vanity, had brought him into the house.

Page 11

Arsinoe screamed aloud, called in her creditors, explained to them all that had occurred and implored them to pursue the thief; and when they only listened to her with an incredulous shrug, she swore that she was speaking the truth, and promised that whether the slave were caught or not she would pay them with the price of her own and her father's personal ornaments. She knew the name of the dealer of whom her father had bought the slave and told it to the unsatisfied dealers, who at last left her to follow up the thief as promptly as possible.

Once more Arsinoe was alone. Tearless, but shivering and scarcely mistress of herself from misery and agitation, she took out her veil, flung it over her head, and hurried through the court and along the streets to her sister.

Verily, since Sabina's visit to the palace all good spirits had deserted it.

CHAPTER XI.

In a perfectly dark spot by the wall of the widow's garden, stood the cynic philosopher who had met Antinous with so little courtesy, defending himself eagerly, but in low tones against the rebukes of another man, who, dressed, like himself in a ragged cloak and bearing a beggar's wallet, appeared to be one of the same kidney.

"Do not deny," said the latter, "that you cling much to the Christians."

"But hear me out," urged the other.

"I need hear nothing, for I have seen you for the tenth time sneaking in to one of their meetings."

"And do I deny it? Do I not honestly confess that I seek truth wherever I may, where I see even a gleam of hope of finding it?"

"Like the Egyptian who wanted to catch the miraculous fish, and at last flung his hook into the sand."

"The man acted very wisely."

"What now!"

"A marvel is not to be found just where everything else is. In hunting for truth you must not be afraid of a bog."

"And the Christian doctrine seems to be very much such a muddy thicket."

"Call it so for aught I care."

“Then beware lest you find yourself sticking in the morass.”

“I will take care of myself.”

“You said just now that there were decent folks among them.”

“A few no doubt. But the others! eternal gods! mere slaves, beggars, ruined handicraftsmen, common people, untaught and unphilosophical brains, and women, for the most part.”

“Avoid them then.”

“You ought to be the last to give me that advice.”

“What do you mean?”

The other went close up to him and asked him in a whisper:

“Why, where do you suppose I get the money with which I pay for our food and lodging?”

“So long as you do not steal it, it is all the same to me.”

“If I had no more, you would ask the question fast enough.”

“Certainly not, we strive after virtue and ought to do everything to render ourselves independent of nature and her cravings. But to be sure she often asserts her rights—to return then: where do you get the money?”

Page 12

"Why, it burns in the purses of the people in there. It is their duty to give to the poor, and to tell the truth, their pleasure also; and so week by week they give me a few drachmae for my suffering brother."

"Bah! you are the only son of your father, and he is dead."

"'All men are brethren' say the Christians, consequently I may call you mine without lying."

"Join them then for aught I care," laughed the other. "How would it be if I followed you among the Christians? Perhaps they would give me weekly money too, for my suffering brother, and then we could have double meals."

The cynics laughed loudly and parted; one went back into the city, the other into the garden belonging to the Christian widow.

Arsinoe had entered here before the dishonest philosopher and had gone straight to Hannah's house without being detained by the gate-keeper. As she got nearer to her destination, she tried more and more earnestly to devise some way in which she might inform her sister of all the dreadful things that had happened, and which she must learn sooner or later, without giving her too great a shock. Her dread was not much less than her grief. As she reflected on the last few days and on all that had occurred, it almost seemed as though she herself had been the cause of the misfortunes of her family.

On the way to see Selene she could shed no tears, but she could not help softly moaning to herself now and then. A woman, who for some distance had kept pace with her, thought she must be suffering some severe bodily pain, and when the girl passed her, she looked after her with sincere compassion, the wailing of the desolate young creature had sounded so piteous.

True, midway, Arsinoe had suddenly stopped and had thought that instead of going to Selene for advice, she would turn round and seek Pollux and ask him to help her. The thought of her lover forced its way through all her sorrow and anxiety, through the reproaches she heaped upon herself and the vague plans floating in the air which her brain—unaccustomed to any serious thought, vainly tried to sketch for the future. He was kind, and would certainly be ready to help her; but maidenly modesty held her back from seeking him at so late an hour; besides, how could she discover him or his parents?

The place where her sister was she was now familiar with, and no one could judge of their position better or give sounder counsel than prudent Selene. So she had not turned round, but had hurried on to reach her destination as soon as possible; and now she was standing before the little house in the garden. Before opening the door she once more considered in what way she could prepare Selene and tell her terrible news,

and, as all that happened stood vividly before her mind's eye, she began to weep once more.

Page 13

In front of her, and following her, men and veiled women, singly or in couples or in larger groups, passed into Paulina's garden. They came from workshops and writing-rooms, from humble houses in narrow lanes, and from the handsomest and largest in the main street. Each and all, from the wealthy merchant down to the slave who could not call the coarse tunic or scanty apron that he wore, his own, walked gravely and with a certain dignified reserve. All who met within that gate greeted each other as friends; the master gave a brotherly kiss to the servant, the slave to his owner; for the congregation to which they all belonged was as one body, animated and dwelt in by Christ, so that each member was esteemed as equal to the others however different their gifts of body or mind might be, or the worldly possessions with which they were endowed. Before God and his Saviour the rich ship-owner or the grey-haired sage stood no higher than the defenceless widow and the ignorant slave crippled with blows. Still, the members of the community submitted to those more implicitly than to these, for the special talents which graced certain superior Christians were gifts of grace from the Lord, readily acknowledged as such and, so far as they concerned the inner man, deemed worthy of honor.

On Sunday, the day of the Resurrection of the Lord, all Christians, without exception, visited their place of assembly for divine worship. To-day, being the middle of the week, all who could or chose came to the love-feast at Paulina's suburban house. She herself dwelt in the city and she had placed the banqueting hall of her villa, which would hold more than a hundred souls, at the disposal of her fellow Christians in that quarter of the town. The regular service was held in the morning, but after the day's labor was ended the Christians met at one table to have an evening meal in common, or—on other occasions to partake of the sacramental supper. After sunset the elders, deacons, and deaconesses—most of whom, so long as it was light, had secular work to attend to—met to take counsel together.

Paulina, the widow of Pudeus and sister of Pontius the architect, was a woman of considerable property and at the same time a prudent steward, who did not consider herself justified in seriously impairing her son's inheritance. This son was residing at Smyrna as a partner in an uncle's business, and always avoided Alexandria, as he did not like his mother's intercourse with the Christians. Paulina took the most anxious care not to make any inroads on the capital intended for him, and never allowed her hospitality to her fellow-believers to cost her any more than it did the other wealthy members of the circle that met at her house. There the rich brought more than they needed for themselves and the poor were always welcome; not feeling themselves oppressed by the benevolence they profited by, for they were often told that their entertainer was not a mortal, but the Saviour, who invited each one who followed him faithfully to be his guest.

Page 14

The hour was approaching which would summon dame Hannah to join the assembly of her fellow Christians. She could not fail to appear, for she was one of the deaconesses entrusted with the distribution of alms and the care of the sick. She noiselessly made her preparations for going, carefully setting the lamp behind the water-pitcher so that it should not dazzle Selene, and she desired Mary to be exact in administering the medicine to her patient. She knew that the girl had yesterday attempted to make away with herself, and guessed the cause; but she asked no questions and disturbed the poor child, who slept a good deal or lay dreaming with open eyes, as little as possible. The old physician wondered at her sound constitution, for since her plunge into the water the fever had left her and even the injured foot was not much the worse. Hannah might now hope the best for Selene if no unforeseen contingency checked her recovery. To prevent this the unfortunate girl was never to be left alone, and Mary had gladly agreed with her friend to fill her place whenever she was obliged to leave the house.

The meeting of the elders and guardians had already begun when Hannah took her tablets in her hand, on which was noted the distribution she had made of the money entrusted to her during the last week. She greeted the sick girl and Mary with a kindly look and whispered to the deformed girl:

“I will think of thee in my prayers thou faithful soul. There is some food in the little cupboard—not much, for we must be sparing, the last medicine was so dear.”

In the little anteroom a lamp was burning which Mary had lighted as it began to grow dark, and the widow paused for a moment, considering whether she should not extinguish it to save the oil. She had taken up the tongs that hung by it, and was about to put it out, when she heard a gentle tap at the house-door. Before she could enquire who it was that asked admission at so late an hour, the door was opened and Arsinoe entered the little hall. Her eyes were still full of tears and she had great difficulty in finding words to return Hannah’s greeting.

“Why what ails you my child?” asked the Christian anxiously when by the dim light, she saw how tearful and sad the girl looked. Arsinoe was long before she could answer. At last she collected herself sufficiently to sob out amid her tears:

“Oh dame Hannah! It is all over with us—my father, our poor father—”

The widow guessed at the blow that had fallen on the sisters and full of anxiety on Selene’s account she interrupted the weeping child saying:

“Hush, hush my child-Selene must not hear you. Come out with me and then you can tell me all.” Once outside the door Hannah put her arm round Arsinoe drew her towards her, kissed her forehead, and said:



“Now speak and tell me every thing; think that I am your mother or your sister. Poor Selene is still too weak to advise or help you. Take courage. What happened to your poor father?”

Page 15

“Struck by apoplexy, dead—dead!” wept the girl. Poor, dear little orphan,” said the widow in a husky voice and she clasped Arsinoe closely in her arms. For some time she allowed the girl to weep silently on her bosom; then she spoke:

“Give me your hand my daughter and tell me how it has all happened so suddenly. Your father was quite well yesterday and now? Yes my girl life is a grave matter, you have to learn it while you are still young. I know you have six little brothers and sisters and perhaps you may soon lack even the necessities of life. But that is no disgrace; I am certainly even poorer than you and yet, by God’s help, I hope to be able to advise you and perhaps even to assist you. Every thing that I can possibly do shall be done, but first I must know how matters stand with you and what you need.”

There was so much kindness and consolation in the Christian’s tones, so much to revive hope that Arsinoe willingly complied with her demand and began her story.

At first, to be sure, her pride shunned confessing how poor, how absolutely destitute they were; but Hannah’s questions soon brought the truth to light; and when Arsinoe perceived that the widow understood the misfortunes of their house in their fullest extent, and that it would be unavailing to conceal how matters stood with her and the children, she yielded to the growing impulse to relieve her soul by pouring out her griefs and described frankly and without reserve the whole position of the family, to the good woman who listened with attention and sympathy. The widow asked about each child separately, and ended by enquiring who, in Arsinoe’s absence, was left in charge of the little ones; and when she heard that the old slave-woman to whose care the children were entrusted, was infirm and half-blind, she shook her head thoughtfully.

“Here help is needed and at once,” she said decidedly. “You must go back to the little ones presently. Your sister must not at present hear of your father’s death; when your future lot is to some extent secure we will tell her by degrees all that has occurred. Now come with me, it is by the Lord’s guidance that you came here at the right moment.”

Hannah conducted Arsinoe to Paulina’s villa, first into a small room at the side of the entrance hall, where the deaconesses took off their veils and their warm wraps in winter evenings. There the girl could be alone, and safe from inquisitive questionings which could not fail to be painful to her. Hannah desired her to await her return, and then joined her colleagues.

Page 16

In order to do so she had to pass through the room where the elders and deacons were sitting in council. The bishop, who presided over the assembly, sat on a raised seat at the head of an oblong table, and on his right hand and his left sat a number of elderly men, some of whom seemed to be of Jewish or Egyptian extraction but most of them were Greeks. In these the lofty intellectual brow was conspicuous, in those a bright, ecstatic expression particularly in the eyes. Hannah went past the assembly with a reverential greeting into the adjoining room in which the deaconesses sat waiting, for women were not admitted to join or hear the deliberations of the elders. The bishop, a fine old man with a full white beard; raised his kindly eyes as the door closed upon Hannah, fixed them for a few moments on the tips of his fingers that he had raised and then addressed the presbyter who had presented for baptism several candidates who had been grounded during the past year in the Christian faith and doctrine, as follows:

“Most of the catechumens you have presented to me cling faithfully no doubt to the Redeemer. They believe in Him and love Him. But have they attained to that sanctification, that new birth in Christ, which alone can justify us in admitting them through baptism among the lambs of our Good Shepherd? Let us beware of the tainted sheep which may infect the whole flock. Verily, in these latter years there has been no lack of them, and they have been received among us and have brought the name of Christian into evil repute. Shall I give you an example? There was an Egyptian in Rhakotis; few seemed to strive so fervently as he for the remission of his sins. He could fast for many days, and yet no sooner was he baptized than he broke into a goldsmith’s shop. He was condemned to death, and before his end he sent for me and confessed to me that in former years he had soiled his soul with many robberies and murders. He had hoped to win forgiveness of his sins by the act of baptism, the mere washing in water, not by repentance and a new birth to a pure and holy life; and he had gone on boldly in new sin because he confidently hoped that he might again count on the unwearied mercy of the Saviour. Others again, who had been brought up in the practice of the ablutions which have to be performed by those who are initiated into the deeper secrets of the heathen mysteries, regarded baptism as an act of purification, a mystical process of happy augury, or at the best a figurative purification of the soul, and crowded to receive it. Here, in Alexandria, the number of these deluded ones is especially great; for where could any superstition find a more favorable soil than in this seat of philosophical half-culture, or over-culture; of the worship of Serapis, of astrology, of societies of Mystics, of visionaries and exorcisers, and of incredulity—the twin-sister of credulity. Be cautious then to hold back from baptism all those who regard it as a preserving charm or an act of good omen—remembering that the same water which, sprinkled on sanctified hearts, leads them to holy living, brings death to the unclean soul. It is your turn to speak, Irenaeus.”

Page 17

"I only have to say," began the young Christian thus designated, "that I have recently met among the catechumens with some who have attached themselves to us from the basest motives. I mean the idlers who are glad to receive our alms. Have you noticed here a cynic philosopher whose starving brother we maintain? Our deacon Clemens has just ascertained that he is the only son of his father—"

"We will investigate this matter more closely when we discuss the distribution of alms," replied the bishop. "Here we have petitions from several women who desire to have their children baptized; this question we cannot decide here; it must be referred to the next Synod. So far as I am concerned, I should be inclined not to reject the prayer of the mothers. Wherein does the utmost aim of the Christian life consist? It seems to me in being perfectly conformable to the example of the Saviour. And was not he a Man among men, a Youth among the young, a Child among children? Did not His existence lend sanctity to every age, and especially childhood? He commanded that little children should be brought to Him, and He promised them the Kingdom of Heaven. Wherefore then should we exclude them and deny them baptism?"

"I cannot share your views," replied a presbyter with a high forehead and sunken eyes. "We ought no doubt to follow the Saviour, but those who tread in His steps should do so of their own free choice, out of love for Him, and after He has sanctified their souls. What is the sense of a new birth in a life that has scarcely begun.

"Your discourse," replied the bishop, "only confirms my opinion that this question is one for a higher assembly. We will now close our discussion of that point, and go on to the care of the poor. Call in the women, my good Justinus."

The deaconesses came into the room and took seats at the lower end of the table, Paulina, the widow of Pudeus, taking her place opposite the bishop in the middle of the other women. She had learnt from Selene's kind nurse in what pressing difficulties the children of the deceased steward now found themselves, and that Hannah had promised to assist them.

The deacons first gave their reports of what their works had been among the poor; after them the women were allowed to speak. Paulina, a tall, slight woman with black hair faintly streaked with gray, drew from her dress, which was perfectly plain, but made of particularly soft, fine white woollen stuff—a tablet that she placed before her, and slowly raising her eyes and looking at the assembly she said:

"Dame Hannah has a melancholy story to tell you, for which I crave your sympathy. Will you be so good as to allow her to speak?"

Page 18

Paulina seemed to feel that she was the hostess to her brethren. She looked ill and suffering; a line of pain had settled about her lips, and there were always dark shades under her eyes; still, there was something firm and decisive in her voice, and her glance was anything rather than soft and winning. After her commanding tones Hannah's tale sounded as soft as a song. She described the different natures of the two sisters as lovingly as though they were her own daughters, each in her own way seemed to her so worthy of compassion, and she spoke with pathetic lament of the unprotected, helpless orphans abandoned to misery, and among them a pretty little blind boy. And she ended her speech by saying:

"The steward's second daughter—she is sixteen and so beautiful that she must be exposed to every temptation—has now the whole charge of the nourishment and care of her six young brothers and sisters. Ought we to withhold from them a protecting hand? No, so surely as we love the Saviour we ought not. You agree with me? Well then, do not let us delay our help. The second daughter of the deceased Keraunus is here, in this house; to-morrow early the children must all quit the palace, and now, while I am speaking, are at home alone and but ill tended."

The Christian woman's good words fell on kindly soil, and the presbyters and deacons determined to recommend the congregation who should assemble at the love-feast to give their assistance to the steward's children.

The elders had still much to discuss, so Hannah and Paulina were charged with the task of appealing to the hearts of the well-to-do members of the congregation to provide for the orphans. The poor widow first conducted her wealthy friend and hostess to the little room where Arsinoe was waiting with growing impatience. She looked paler than usual but, in spite of her tear-reddened eyes which she kept fixed on the ground, she was so lovely, so touchingly lovely, that the mere sight of her moved Paulina's heart. She had once had two children, an only daughter besides her son. The girl had died in the spring-time of her maidenhood, and Paulina thought of her at every hour of her life. It was for her sake that she had been baptized and devoted her existence to a series of painful sacrifices. She strove with all her might to be a good Christian—for surely she, the self-denying woman who had taken up the cross of her own free will, the suffering creature who loved stillness and who had made her country-house, which she visited daily, a scene of unrest, could not fail to win Heaven, and there she hoped to meet her innocent child.

Arsinoe reminded her of her Helena, who certainly had been far less fair than the steward's lovely daughter, but whose image had assumed new and glorified forms in the mother's faithful heart. Since her son had left home for a foreign country she had often asked herself whether she might not find some young creature to take into her home, to attach to herself, to bring up as a Christian, and to bring as an offering to her Saviour's feet.

Page 19

Her daughter had died a heathen, and nothing troubled Paulina so deeply as that her soul was lost, and that her own struggling and striving for grace could not lead her to the goal beyond the grave. No sacrifice seemed too great to purchase her child's beatitude, and now, standing before Arsinoe and looking at her with deep emotion and admiration, she was seized with an idea which swiftly ripened to resolve. She would win this sweet soul for the Redeemer, and implore Him with ceaseless prayers to save her hapless child as a reward for the work of grace in Arsinoe's soul; and she felt as if she had signed the compact with the Redeemer, when, fully determined on this course, she went up to the girl and asked her:

"You are quite forlorn, quite without relations?" Arsinoe bowed her head in assent, and Paulina went on:

"And do you bear your loss with resignation?"

"What is resignation?" asked the girl modestly. Hannah laid her hand on the widow's arm and whispered:

"She is a heathen."

"I know it," said Paulina shortly, and then went on kindly but positively:

"You and yours have lost both parents and a home by your father's death. You shall find a new home in my house, with me; I ask nothing of you in return but your love."

Arsinoe looked at the haughty lady in astonishment. She could not yet feel any impulse of affection towards her, and she did not as yet understand that what was required of her was the one gift which the best will, the most loving heart in the world, could not offer at a command. Paulina did not wait for her reply, but signed to Hannah to follow her to join the congregation now assembled at the evening meal.

A quarter of an hour later the two women returned. The steward's orphans were provided for. Two or three Christian families were ready and willing to take in some of them, and many a kindly house-mother had begged to have the blind child; but in vain, for Hannah had claimed the right to bring up the hapless little boy in her own house, at any rate for the present. She knew how Selene clung to him, and hoped by his presence to be able to work powerfully on the crushed and chilled heart of the poor girl.

Arsinoe did not contravene the arrangements of the two women. She thanked them, indeed, for she felt that she once more stood on firm ground, but she also was immediately aware that it would be strewn with sharp stones. The thought of parting from her little brothers and sisters was terrible and cruel, and never left her mind for an instant, while, accompanied by Hannah in person, she made her way back to Lochias.



The next morning her kind friend appeared again and led her and the little troupe to Paulina's town-house. The steward's creditors divided his little possessions; nothing but the chest of papyri followed the girl to her new home. The hour in which the fondly-linked circle of children was riven asunder, when one child was taken here and another there, was the bitterest which Arsinoe had ever experienced or ever could experience through all the after years of her life.

Page 20

CHAPTER XII.

A lovely garden adjoined the Caesareum, the palace in which Sabina was residing. Balbilla was fond of lingering there, and as the morning of the twenty-ninth of December was particularly brilliant—the sky and its infinite mirror the sea, gleaming in indescribably deep blue, while the fragrance of a flowering shrub was wafted in at her window like an invitation to quit the house she had sought a certain bench which, though placed in a sunny spot, was slightly shaded by an acacia. This seat was screened from the more public paths by bushes; the promenaders who did not seek Balbilla could not observe her here, but she could command a view, through a gap in the foliage, of the path, which was strewn with small shells.

To-day, however, the young poetess was far from feeling any curiosity; instead of gazing at the shrubbery enlivened by birds, at the clear atmosphere or the sparkling sea, her eyes were fixed on a yellow roll of papyrus and she was impressing very dry details on her retentive memory.

She had determined to keep her word to learn to speak, write, and compose verses in the Aeolian dialect of the Greek tongue. She had chosen for her teacher Apollonius, the great grammarian, who was apt to call his scholars “the dullards;” and the work which was the present object of her studies was derived from the famous library of the Serapeum, which far exceeded in completeness that of the Museum since the siege of Julius Caesar in the Bruchiom, when the great Museum library was burnt.

Any one observing Balbilla at her occupation could hardly have believed that she was studying. There was no fixed effort in her eyes or on her brow; still, she read line for line, not skipping a single word; only she did it not like a man who climbs a mountain with sweat on his brow, but like a loungeur who walks in the main street of some great city, and is charmed at every new and strange thing that meets his eye. Each time she came upon some form of structure in the book she was reading that had been hitherto unknown to her, she was so delighted that she clapped her hands and laughed out softly. Her learned master had never before met with so cheerful a student, and it annoyed him, for to him science was a serious matter while she seemed to make a joke of it, as she did of every thing, and so desecrated it in his eyes. After she had been sitting an hour on the bench, studying in her own way, she rolled up the book and stood up to refresh herself a little. Feeling sure that no one could see her, she stretched herself in all her limbs and then stepped up to the gap in the shrubbery in order to see who a man in boots might be who was pacing up and down in the broad path beyond.

Page 21

It was the praetor—and yet it was not! Verus, under this aspect at any rate, she had never seen till now. Where was the smile that was wont to twinkle in his merry eye like the sparkle of a diamond and to play saucily about his lips—where the unwrinkled serenity of his brow and the defiantly audacious demeanor of his whole handsome person? He was slowly striding up and down with a gloomy fire in his eye, a deeply-lined brow, and his head sunk on his breast: and yet it was not bowed with sorrow. If so, could he have snapped his fingers in the air as he did just as he passed in front of Balbilla, as much as to say: “Come what may! to-day I live and laugh the future in the face!”

But this vestige of his old reckless audacity did not last longer than the time it took to part his fingers again, and the next time Verus passed Balbilla he looked, if possible, more gloomy than before. Something very unpleasant must have arisen to spoil the good humor of her friend's husband; and the poetess was sincerely sorry; for, though she herself had daily to suffer under the praetor's impertinence, she always forgave it for the sake of the graceful form in which he knew how to clothe his incivilities.

Balbilla longed to see Verus content once more, and she therefore came forth from her hiding place. As soon as he saw her he altered the expression of his features and cried out as brightly as ever:

“Welcome, fairest of the fair!”

She made believe not to recognize him, but, as she passed him and bowed her curly head, she said gravely and in deep tones:

“Good day to you, Timon.”

“Timon?” he asked, taking her hand.

“Ah! is it you, Verus?” she answered, as though surprised. “I thought the Athenian misanthrope had quitted Hades and come to take the air in this garden.”

“You thought rightly,” replied the praetor. “But when Orpheus sings the trees dance, the Muse can turn dull, motionless stones into a Bacchante, and when Balbilla appears Timon is at once transformed into the happy Verus.”

“The miracle does not astonish me,” laughed the girl. “But is it permitted to ask what dark spirit so effectually produced the contrary result, and made a Timon of the fair Lucilla's happy husband?”

“I ought rather to beware of letting you see the monster, or our joyous muse Balbilla might easily become the sinister Hecate. But the malicious sprite is close at hand, for he is hidden in this little roll.”

“A document from Caesar?”

“Oh! no, only a letter from a Jew.”

“Possibly the father of some fair daughter!”

“Wrongly guessed—as wrong as possible!”

“You excite my curiosity.”

“Mine has already been satisfied by this roll. Horace is wise when he says that man should never trouble himself about the future.”

“An oracle!”

“Something of the kind.”

Page 22

“And can that darken this lovely morning to you? Did you ever see me melancholy? Yet my future is threatened by a prophecy—such a hideous prophecy.”

“The fate of men is different to the destiny of women.”

“Would you like to hear what was prophesied of me?”

“What a question!”

“Listen then; the saying I will repeat to you came to me from no less an oracle than the Delphic Pythia:

“That which thou boldest most precious and dear
Shall be torn from thy keeping,
And from the heights of Olympus,
Down shalt thou fall in the dust.”

“Is that all?”

“Nay—two consolatory lines follow.”

“And they are—?”

“Still the contemplative eye
Discerns under mutable sand drifts
Stable foundations of stone,
Marble and natural rock.”

“And you are inclined to complain of this oracle?”

“Is it so pleasant to have to wade through dust? We have enough of that intolerable nuisance here in Egypt—or am I to be delighted at the prospect of hurting my feet on hard stones?”

“And what do the interpreters say?”

“Only silly nonsense.”

“You have never found the right one; but I—I see the meaning of the oracle.”

“You?”

“Ay, I! The stern Balbilla will at last descend from the lofty Olympus of her high-anti-mightiness and no longer disdain that immutable foundation-rock, the adoration of her faithful Verus.”

"That foundation—that rock!" laughed the girl. "I should think it as well advised to try to walk on the surface of the sea out there as on that rock!"

"Only try."

"It is not necessary; Lucilla has made the experiment for me. Your interpretation is wrong; Caesar gave me a far better one."

"What was that?"

"That I should give up writing poetry and devote myself to strict scientific studies. He advised me to try astronomy."

"Astronomy," repeated Verus, growing graver. Farewell, fair one; I must go to Caesar!"

"We were with him yesterday at Lochias. How everything is changed there! The pretty little gate house is gone, there is nothing more to be seen of all the cheerful bustle of builders and artists, and what were gay workshops are turned into dull, commonplace halls. The screens in the hall of the Muses had to go a week ago, and with them the young scatter-brain who set himself against my curls with so much energy that I was on the point of sacrificing them—"

"Without them you would no longer be Balbilla," cried Verus eagerly. "The artist condemns all that is not permanently beautiful, but we are glad to see any thing that is graceful, and can find pleasure in it with the other children of the time. The sculptor may dress his goddesses after the fashion of graver days and the laws of his art, but mortal women—if he is wise—after the fashion of the day. However, I am heartily sorry for that clever, genial young fellow. He has offended Caesar and was turned out of the palace, and now he is nowhere to be found."

Page 23

"Oh!" cried Balbilla, full of regret, "poor man—and such a fine fellow! And my bust? we must seek him out. If the opportunity offers I will entreat Caesar—"

"Hadrian will hear nothing about him. Pollux has offended him deeply."

"From whom do you know that?"

"From Antinous."

"We saw him, too, only yesterday," cried Balbilla, eagerly.

"If ever a man was permitted to wear the form of a god among mortals, it is he."

"Romantic creature!"

"I know no one who could look upon him with indifference. He is a beautiful dreamer, and the trace of suffering which we observed yesterday in his countenance is probably nothing more than the outward expression of that obscure regret, felt by all that is perfect, for the joy of development and conscious ripening into an incarnation of the ideal in its own kind, of which he is an instance in himself."

The poetess spoke the last words in a rapt tone, as if the form of a god was then and there before her eyes. Verus had listened to her with a smile, but now he interrupted her, and, holding up a warning finger, he said:

"Poetess, philosopher, and sweetest maiden, beware of descending from your Olympus for the sake of this boy! When imagination and dreaminess meet half-way they make a pair which float in the clouds and never even suspect the existence of that firmer ground of which your oracle speaks."

"Nonsense," said Balbilla crossly. "Before we can fall in love with a statue, Prometheus must animate it with a soul and fire from heaven."

"But often," retorted the praetor, "Eros proves to be a substitute for that unhappy friend of the gods."

"The true or the sham Eros," asked Balbilla testily.

"Certainly not the sham Eros," replied Verus. "On this occasion he merely plays the part of a kindly monitor, taking the place of Pontius, the architect, of whom your worthy matron-companion is so much afraid. During the tumult of the Dionysiac festival you are reported to have carried on as grave a discussion as any two gray-bearded philosophers walking in the Stoa among attentive students."

"With intelligent men, no doubt, we talk with intelligence!"

“Aye, and with stupid ones gayly. How much reason have I to be thankful that I am one of the stupid ones. Farewell, till we meet again, fair Balbilla,” and the praetor hurried off.

Outside the Caesareum he got into his chariot and set out for Lochias. The charioteer held the reins, while he himself gazed at the roll in his hand which contained the result of the calculations of the astrologer, Rabbi Simeon Ben Jochai; and this was certainly likely enough to disturb the cheerfulness of the most reckless of men.

Page 24

When, during the night which preceded the praetor's birthday, the Emperor should study the heavens with special reference to the position of the stars at his birth, he would find that, as far as till the end of the second hour after midnight all the favorable planets promised Verus a happy lot, success and distinction. But, with the commencement of the third hour—so said Ben Jochai—misfortune and death would take possession of his house of destiny; in the fourth hour his star would vanish, and anything further that might declare itself in the sky during that night would have nothing more to do with him, or his destiny. The Emperor's star would triumph over his. Verus could make out but little of the signs and calculations in the tables annexed by the Jew, but that little confirmed what was told in the written statement.

The praetor's horses carried him swiftly along while he reflected on what remained for him to do under these unfavorable circumstances, in order not to be forced to give up entirely the highest goal of his ambition. If the Rabbi's observations were accurate—and of this Verus did not for a moment doubt—all his hopes of adoption were at an end in spite of Sabina's support. How should Hadrian choose for his son and successor a man who was destined to die before him? How could he, Verus, expect that Caesar should ally his fortunate star with the fatal star of another doomed to die?

These reflections did nothing to help him, and yet he could not escape from them, till suddenly his charioteer pulled up the horses abruptly by the side of the footway to make room for a delegation of Egyptian priests who were going in procession to Lochias. The powerful hand with which his servant had promptly controlled the fiery spirit of the animals excited his approbation, and seemed to inspire him to put a clog boldly on the wheels of speeding fate. When they were no longer detained by the Egyptian delegates he desired the charioteer to drive slowly, for he wished to gain time for consideration.

"Until the third hour after midnight," said he to himself. "all is to go well; it is not till the fourth hour that signs are to appear in the sky which are of evil augury for me. Of course the sheep will play round the dead lion, and the ass will even spurn him with his hoof so long as he is merely sick. In the short space of time between the third and fourth hours all the signs of evil are crowded together. They must be visible; but"—and this "but" brought sudden illumination to the praetor's mind, "why should Caesar see them?"

The anxious aspirant's heart beat faster, his brain worked more actively, and he desired the driver to make a short circuit, for he wanted to gain yet more time for the ideas that were germinating in his mind to grow and ripen.

Page 25

Verus was no schemer; he walked in at the front door with a free and careless step, and scorned to climb the backstairs. Only for the greatest object and aim of his life was he prepared to sacrifice his inclinations, his comfort and his pride, and to make unhesitating use of every means at hand. For the sake of that he had already done many things which he regretted, and the man who steals one sheep out of the flock is followed by others without intending it. The first degrading action that a man commits is sure to be followed by a second and a third. What Verus was now projecting he regarded as being a simple act of self-defence; and after all, it consisted merely in detaining Hadrian for an hour, interrupting him in an idle occupation—the observation of the stars.

There were two men who might be helpful to him in this matter—Antinous and the slave Mastor. He first thought of Mastor; but the Sarmatian was faithfully devoted to his master and could not be bribed. And besides!—No! it really was too far beneath him to make common cause with a slave. But he could count even less on support from Antinous. Sabina hated her husband's favorite, and for her sake Verus had never met the young Bithynian on particularly friendly terms. He fancied, too, that he had observed that the quiet, dreamy lad kept out of his way. It was only by intimidation, probably, that the favorite could be induced to do him a service.

At any rate, the first thing to be done was to visit Lochias and there to keep a lookout with his eyes wide open. If the Emperor were in a happy frame of mind he might, perhaps, be induced to appear during the latter part of the night at the banquet which Verus was giving on the eve of his birthday, and at which all that was beautiful to the eye and ear was to be seen and heard; or a thousand favoring and helpful accidents might occur—and at any rate the Rabbi's forecast furnished him good fortune for the next few years.

As he dismounted from his chariot in the newly-paved forecourt and was conducted to the Emperor's anteroom he looked as bright and free from care as if the future lay before him sunny and cloudless.

Hadrian now occupied the restored palace, not as an architect from Rome but as sovereign of the world; he had shown himself to the Alexandrians and had been received with rejoicings and an unheard-of display in his honor. The satisfaction caused by the imperial visit was everywhere conspicuous and often found expression in exaggerated terms; indeed the council had passed a resolution to the effect that the month of December, being that in which the city had had the honor of welcoming the 'Imperator,' should henceforth be called:

"Hadrianus." The Emperor had to receive one deputation after another and to hold audience after audience, and on the following morning the dramatic representations were to begin, the processions and games which promised to last through many days, or—as Hadrian himself expressed it—to rob him of at least a hundred good hours.

Notwithstanding, the monarch found time to settle all the affairs of the state, and at night to question the stars as to the fate which awaited him and his dominions during all the seasons of the new year now so close at hand.

Page 26

The aspect of the palace at Lochias was entirely changed. In the place of the gay little gate-house stood a large tent of gorgeous purple stuff, in which the Emperor's body-guard was quartered, and opposite to it another was pitched for lictors and messengers. The stables were full of horses. Hadrian's own horse, Borysthenes, which had had too long a rest, pawed and stamped impatiently in a separate stall, and close at hand the Emperor's retrievers, boar-hounds and harriers were housed in hastily-contrived yards and kennels.

In the wide space of the first court soldiers were encamped, and close under the walls squatted men and women—Egyptians, Greeks and Hebrews—who desired to offer petitions to the sovereign. Chariots drove in and out, litters came and went, chamberlains and other officials hurried hither and thither. The anterooms were crowded with men of the upper classes of the citizens who hoped to be granted audience by the Emperor at the proper hour. Slaves, who offered refreshments to those who waited or stood idly looking on, were to be seen in every room, and official persons, with rolls of manuscript under their arms, bustled into the inner rooms or out of the palace to carry into effect the orders of their superior.

The hall of the Muses had been turned into a grand banqueting-hall. Papias, who was now on his way to Italy by the Emperor's command, had restored the damaged shoulder of the Urania. Couches and divans stood between the statues, and under a canopy at the upper end of the vast room stood a throne on which Hadrian sat when he held audience. On these occasions he always appeared in the purple, but in his writing-room, which he had not changed for another, he laid aside the imperial mantle and was no more splendid in his garb than the architect Claudius Venator had been.

In the rooms that had belonged to the deceased Keraunus now dwelt an Egyptian without wife or children—a stern and prudent man who had done good service as house-steward to the prefect Titianus, and the living-room of the evicted family now looked dreary and uninhabited. The mosaic pavement which had indirectly caused the death of Keraunus, was now on its way to Rome, and the new steward had not thought it worth while to fill up the empty, dusty, broken-up place which had been left in the floor of his room by the removal of the work of art, nor even to cover it over with mats. Not a single cheerful note was audible in the abandoned dwelling but the twitter of the birds which still came morning and evening to perch on the balcony, for Arsinoe and the children had never neglected to strew the parapet with crumbs for them at the end of each meal.

All that was gracious, all that was attractive in the old palace had vanished at Sabina's visit, and even Hadrian himself was a different man to what he had been a few days previously. The dignity with which he appeared in public was truly imperial and unapproachable, and even when he sat with his intimates in his favorite room he was grave, gloomy and taciturn. The oracle, the stars, and other signs announced some terrible catastrophe for the coming year with a certainty that he could not evade; and the

few careless days that he had been permitted to enjoy at Lochias had ended with unsatisfactory occurrences.

Page 27

His wife, whose bitter nature struck him in all its repellent harshness here in Alexandria—where everything assumed sharper outlines and more accentuated movement than in Rome—had demanded of him boldly that he should no longer defer the adoption of the praetor.

He was anxious and unsatisfied; the infinite void in his heart yawned before him whenever he looked into his soul, and at every glance at the future of his external life a long course of petty trifles started up before him which could not fail to stand in the way of his unwearying impulse to work. Even the vegetative existence of his handsome favorite Antinous, untroubled as it was by the sorrows or the joys of life, had undergone a change. The youth was often moody, restless and sad. Some foreign influences seemed to have affected him, for he was no longer content to hang about his person like a shadow; no, he yearned for liberty, had stolen into the city several times, seeking there the pleasures of his age which formerly he had avoided.

Nay, a change had even come over his cheerful and willing slave Mastor. Only his hound remained always the same in unaltered fidelity.

And he himself? He was the same to-day as ten years since: different every day and at every hour of the day.

CHAPTER XIII.

When Verus entered the palace Hadrian had returned thither but a few minutes previously from the city. The praetor was conducted through the reception-rooms to the private apartments, and here he had not long to wait, for Hadrian wished to speak with him immediately. He found the sovereign so thoroughly out of tune that he could not think of inviting him to his banquet. The Emperor restlessly paced the room while Verus answered his questions as to the latest proceedings of the Senate in Rome, but he several times interrupted his walk and gazed into the adjoining room.

Just as the praetor had concluded his report Argus set up a howl of delight and Antinous came into the room. Verus at once withdrew into the window and pretended to be absorbed in looking out on the harbor.

“Where have you been?” asked the Emperor, disregarding the praetor’s presence.

“Into the city a little way,” was the Bithynian’s answer.

“But you know I cannot bear to miss you when I come home.”

“I thought you would have been longer absent.”

“For the future arrange so that I may be able to find you at whatever time I may seek you. Tell me, you do not like to see me vexed and worried?”

“No, my lord,” said the lad and he raised a supplicating hand and looked beseechingly at his master.

“Then let it pass. But now for something else; how did this little phial come into the hands of the dealer Hiram?” As he spoke the Emperor took from his table the little bottle of Vasa Murrhina which the lad had given to Arsinoe and which she had sold to the Phoenician, and held it up before the favorite’s eyes. Antinous turned pale, and stammered in great confusion. “It is incomprehensible—I cannot in the least recollect —”

Page 28

"Then I will assist your memory," said the Emperor decidedly. "The Phoenician appears to me to be an honest man than that rogue Gabinius. In his collection, which I have just been to see, I found this gem, that Plotina—do you hear me, boy—that Trajan's wife Plotina, my heart's friend, never to be forgotten, gave me years ago. It was one of my dearest possessions and yet I thought it not too precious to give to you on your last birthday."

"Oh, my lord, my dear lord!" cried Antinous in a low tone and again lifting his eyes and hands in entreaty.

"Now, I ask you," continued Hadrian, gravely, and without allowing himself to yield to the lad's beseeching looks, "how could this object have passed into the possession of one of the daughters of the wretched palace-steward Keraunus from whom Hiram confessed that he had bought it?"

Antinous vainly strove for utterance; Hadrian however came to his aid by asking him more angrily than before:

"Did the girl steal it from you? Out with the truth!"

"No, no," replied the Bithynian quickly and decidedly. "Certainly not. I remember—wait a minute—yes, that was it.—You know it contained excellent balsam, and when the big dog threw down Selene—the steward's daughter is called Selene—threw her down the steps so that she lay hurt on the stones I fetched the phial and gave her the balsam."

"With the bottle that held it?" asked the Emperor looking at Antinous.

"Yes, my lord—I had no other."

"And she kept it and sold it at once."

"You know, of course, her father—"

"A gang of thieves!" snarled Hadrian.

"Do you know what has become of the girl?"

"Yes my lord," said Antinous trembling with alarm. "I will have her taken by the lictors," asserted the infuriated sovereign.

"No," said the lad positively. "No, you positively must not do that."

"No—? we shall see!"



“No, positively not, for at the same time you must know that Keraunus’ daughter Selene —”

“Well?”

“She flung herself into the water in despair; yes, into the water, at night—into the sea.”

“Oh!” said Hadrian more gently, “that certainly alters the case. The lictors would find it difficult to apprehend a shade and the girl has suffered the worst punishment of all.— But you? what shall I say to your perfidy? You knew the value of the gem. You knew how highly I valued it, and could part with it to such hands?”

“It contained the salve,” stammered the boy. “How could I think—?”

The Emperor interrupted the boy, striking his forehead with his hand as he spoke:

“Aye, think—we have known unfortunately too long that thinking is not your strong point. This little bottle has cost me a pretty sum; still, as it once belonged to you I give it back to you again; I only require you to take better care of it this time. I shall ask for it again before long! But in the name of all the gods, boy, what is the matter? Am I so alarming that a simple question from me is enough to drive all the blood out of your cheeks? Really and truly, if I had not had the thing from Plotina I should have left it in the Phoenician’s hands and not have made all this coil about it.”

Page 29

Antinous went quickly up to the Emperor to kiss his hand, but Hadrian pressed his lips to his brow with fatherly affection.

“Simpleton,” he said, “if you want me to be pleased with you, you must be again just what you were before we came to Alexandria. Leave it to others to do things to vex me. You are created by the gods to delight me.”

During Hadrian’s last words a chamberlain had entered the room to inform the Emperor that the deputation of the Egyptian priesthood had arrived to do homage to him. He immediately assumed the purple mantle and proceeded to the hall of the Muses where, surrounded by his court, he received the high-priests and spiritual fathers of the different temples of the Nile Valley, to be hailed by them as the Son of Sun-god, and to assure them and the religion they cherished his gracious countenance. He vouchsafed his consent to their prayer that he would add sanctity and happiness to the temples of the immortals which they served by gracing them with his presence, but set aside for the moment the question as to which town might be permitted to have the care of the recently-discovered Apis.

This audience took up several hours. Verus shirked the duty of attending it with Titianus and the other dignitaries of the court, and remained sitting motionless by the window; it was not till Hadrian was gone from the room that he came forward into it again. He was quite alone, for Antinous had left the room with the Emperor. The praetor’s remaining behind had not escaped the lad’s notice, but he sought to avoid him, for the domineering, mocking spirit of Verus repelled him. Besides this the terror which he had gone through, as well as the consciousness that he had been guilty of a lie and had daringly deceived his kind master, had upset a soul hitherto untainted by any subterfuge and had thrown him off his balance. He longed to be alone, for it would have been keenly painful to him at this moment to discuss indifferent subjects, or to be forced to affect an easy demeanor. He sat in his little room, before a table, with his face buried in his hands that rested on it.

Verus did not immediately follow him, for he understood what was passing in his mind and knew that here he could not escape him. In a few minutes all was still alike in the large room and in the small one. Then the praetor heard the door between the smaller room and the corridor hastily opened and immediately the Bithynian’s exclamation:

“At last, Mastor—have you seen Selene?”

With two long, noiseless steps Verus went close to the door leading into the adjoining room, and listened for the slave’s answer, though a less sharp ear than that of the praetor might have heard every syllable.

“How should I have seen her?” asked the Sarmatian sharply. “She is still suffering and in bed. I gave your flowers to the deformed girl who takes care of her; but I will not do it



again, you may rely upon it, not if you coax even more fondly than you did yesterday and promise me all Caesar's treasure into the bargain! And what can you want with that wretched, pale-faced, innocent creature? I am but a poor slave, but I can tell you this
—"

Page 30

Here the Sarmatian broke off abruptly, and Verus rightly guessed that Antinous had remembered his presence in the Emperor's room and had signed to the slave to be silent.

But the listener had learnt enough. The favorite had told his master a lie, and the suicide of the steward's daughter was a pure romance. Who would have believed that the silent, dreamy lad had so much presence of mind, and such cunning powers of invention? The praetor's handsome face was radiant with satisfaction as he made these reflections, for now he had the Bithynian under his thumb, and now he knew how to accomplish all he wished. Antinous himself had indicated the right course when he had hastened to the Emperor with a gush of tenderness, in which the warmth was certainly not affected, to kiss his hand.

The favorite loved his master, and Verus could ground his demands on this love without exposing himself, or having to dread the Emperor's avenging hand in case of betrayal. He knocked at the door of the adjoining room with a firm hand, and then went confidently and composedly up to the Bithyman, told him that he had an important matter to discuss with him, begged him to return with him into the Emperor's room and then said, as soon as they were alone together:

"I am so unfortunate as not to be able to number you among my particular friends; but one strong sentiment we have in common. We both love Caesar."

"I love him, certainly," replied the lad.

"Well then, you must have it at heart to spare him all great sorrow, and to prevent grave apprehensions from paralyzing the pinions of his free and noble soul."

"No doubt."

"I knew I should find a colleague in you. See this roll. It contains the calculations and diagrams of the greatest astrologer of our time, and from these it is to be discovered that this night, from the end of the second hour of the morning till the beginning of the fourth, the stars will announce fearful disasters to our Sovereign. Do you understand?"

"Alas! perfectly."

"After that the indications of evil disappear. Now if we could only succeed in preventing Hadrian observing the heavens merely during the third hour after midnight we should preserve him from trouble and anxiety, which will torment and spoil his life. Who knows whether the stars may not be? But even if they tell the truth, misfortune, when it does come, always comes much too soon. Do you agree with me?"

"Your suggestion sounds a very sensible one—still I think—"

“It is both sensible and wise,” said the praetor, shortly and decidedly, interrupting the boy. “And it must be your part to hinder Hadrian from marking the course of the stars from the end of the second to the beginning of the fourth hour after midnight.”

“My part?” cried Antinous, startled.

“Yours—for you are the only person who can accomplish it.”

Page 31

"I?" repeated the Bithynian, greatly perturbed. "I—disturb Caesar in his observations!"

"It is your duty."

"But he never allows any one to disturb him at his studies, and if I were to attempt it he would be very angry and send me off in no time. No, no, what you ask is impossible."

"It is not only possible but imperatively necessary."

"That it certainly cannot be," replied Antinous, clasping his forehead in his hand. "Only listen! Hadrian has known for several days past that some great misfortune threatens him. I heard it from his own lips. If you know him at all you must know that he gazes at the stars not merely to rejoice in future happiness, but also to fortify himself against the disasters which threaten him or the state. What would crush a weaker man only serves to arm his bold spirit. He can bear all that may befall, and it would be a crime to deceive him."

"To cloud his heart and mind would be a greater," retorted Verus. "Devise some means of taking him away from his star-gazing for only an hour."

"I dare not, and even if I wished it, it could not be done. Do you suppose he follows me whenever I call?"

"But you know him; invent something which will be sure to make him come down from his watchtower."

"I cannot invent or think of any thing."

"Nothing?" asked Verus, going close tip to the Bithynian. "You just now gave striking proof to the contrary."

Antinous turned pale and the praetor went on:

"When you wanted to rescue the fair Selene from the lictors your swift invention threw her into the sea!"

"She did throw herself in, as truly as that the gods—"

"Stay, stay," cried the praetor. "No perjury, at least! Selene is living, you send her flowers, and if I should think proper to conduct Hadrian to the house of Paulina—"

"Oh!" cried Antinous lamentably enough, and grasping the Roman's hand. "You will not—you can not. Oh Verus! you will not do that."

“Simpleton,” laughed the praetor, slapping the alarmed youth lightly on the shoulder. “What good could it do me to ruin you? I have only one thing at heart just now, and that is to save Caesar from care and anxiety. Keep him occupied only during the third hour after midnight and you may count on my friendship; but if out of fear or ill-will you refuse me your assistance you do not deserve your sovereign’s favor and then you will compel me—”

“No more, no more!” cried Antinous interrupting his tormentor in despair.

“Then you promise me to carry out my wish?”

“Yes, by Hercules! Yes, what you require shall be done. But eternal gods! how am I to get Caesar—”

“That, my young friend, I leave with perfect confidence to you and your shrewdness.”

“I am not shrewd—I can devise nothing,” groaned the lad.

Page 32

“What you could do out of terror of your master you can do still better for love of him,” retorted the praetor. “The problem is an easy one; and if after all you should not succeed I shall feel it no less than my duty to explain to Hadrian how well Antinous can take care of his own interests and how badly of his master’s peace of mind. Till tomorrow, my handsome friend—and if for the future you have flowers to send, my slaves are quite at your service.”

With these words the praetor left the room, but Antinous stood like one crushed, pressing his brow against the cold porphyry pillar by the window. What Verus required of him did not seem to have any harm in it, and yet it was not right. It was treason to his noble master, whom he loved with tender devotion as a father, a wise, kind friend, and preceptor, and whom he revered and feared as though he were a god. To plot to hide impending trouble from him, as if he were not a man but a feeble weakling, was absurd and contemptible, and must introduce an error of unknown importance and extent into his sovereign’s far-seeing predeterminations. Many other reasons against the praetor’s demands crowded on him, and as each occurred to his mind he cursed his tardy spirit which never let him see or think the right thing till it was too late. His first deceit had already involved him in a second.

He hated himself; he hit his forehead with his fists and sobbed aloud bitterly again and again, though he shed no tears. Still, in the midst of his self-accusation, the flattering voice made itself heard in his soul: “It is only to preserve your master from sorrow, and it is nothing wrong that you are asked to do.” And each time that his inward ear heard these words he began to puzzle his brain to discover in what way it might be possible for him to tempt the Emperor, at the hour named, down from his watch-tower in the palace. But he could hit on no practicable plan.

“It cannot be done, no—it cannot be done!” he muttered to himself and then he asked himself if it were not even his duty to defy the praetor and to confess to Hadrian that he had deceived him in the morning. If only it had not been for the little bottle! Could he ever confess that he had heedlessly parted with this gift of all others from his master? No, it was too hard, it might cost him his sovereign’s affection for ever. And if he contented himself with a half-truth and confessed, merely to anticipate the praetor’s accusation, that Selene was still living, then he would involve the daughters of the hapless Keraunus in persecution and disgrace Selene whom he loved with all the devotion of a first passion, which was enhanced and increased by the hindrances that had come in its way. It was impossible to confess his guilt—quite impossible. The longer he thought, tormenting himself to find some way out of it all, the more confused he became, and the more impotent his efforts at resistance. The praetor had entangled him with thongs and meshes, and at every struggle to escape they only seemed knotted more closely round him.

Page 33

His head began to ache sadly; and what an endless time Caesar was absent! He dreaded his return, and yet he longed for it. When at last Hadrian came in and signed to Master to relieve him of his imperial robes, Antinous slipped behind him, and silently and carefully fulfilled the slave's office. He felt uneasy and worried, and yet he forced himself to appear in good spirits during supper when he had to sit opposite the Emperor.

When, shortly before midnight, Hadrian rose from the table to go up to the watch-tower on the northern side of the palace, Antinous begged to be allowed to carry his instruments for him, and the Emperor, stroking his hair, said kindly:

"You are my dear and faithful companion. Youth has a right to go astray now and then so long as it does not entirely forget the path in which it ought to tread."

Antinous was deeply touched by these words, and he secretly pressed to his lips a fold of the Emperor's toga as he walked in front. It was as though he wanted to make amends in advance for the crime he had not yet committed.

Wrapped in his cloak he kept the Emperor silent company during his studies, till the close of the first hour after midnight. The sharp, north wind which blew through the darkness did his aching head good, and still he racked his wits for some pretext to attract Hadrian from his labors, but in vain. His tormented brain was like a dried-up well; bucket after bucket did he send down, but not one brought up the refreshing draught he needed. Nothing—nothing could he think of that could conduce to his end. Once he plucked up courage and said imploringly as he went close up to the Emperor: "Go down earlier to-night my lord; you really do not allow yourself enough rest and will injure your health."

Hadrian let him speak, and answered kindly:

"I sleep in the morning. If you are tired, go to bed now."

But Antinous remained, gazing, like his master, at the stars. He knew very few of the brilliant bodies by their names, but some of them were very dear to him, particularly the Pleiades which his father had pointed out to him and which reminded him of his home. There he had been so quiet and happy, and how wildly his anxious heart was throbbing now!

"Go to bed, the second hour is beginning," said Hadrian.

"Already!" said the boy; and as he reflected how soon that must be done which Verus had required of him, and then looked up again at the heavens, it seemed to him as though all the stars in the blue vault over his head had glided from their places and were dancing in wild and whirling confusion between the sky and the sea. He closed his eyes

in his bewilderment; then, bidding his master good-night he lighted a torch and by its flaring and doubtful light descended from the tower.

Page 34

Pontius had erected this slight structure expressly for Hadrian's nightly observations. It was built of timber and Nile-mud and stood up as a tall turret on the secure foundation of an ancient watch-tower built of hewn stone, which, standing among the low buildings that served as storehouses for the palace, commanded a free outlook over all the quarters of the sky. Hadrian, who liked to be alone and undisturbed when observing the heavens, had preferred this erection—even after he had made himself known to the Alexandrians—to the great observatory of the Serapeum, from which a still broader horizon was visible.

After Antinous had got out of the smaller and newer tower into the larger and older one he sat down on one of the lowest steps to collect his thoughts and to quiet his loudly-beating heart. His vain cogitations began all over again. Time slipped on-between the present moment and the deed to be done there were but a certain number of minutes. He told himself so, and his weary brain stirred more actively, suggesting to him to feign illness and bring the Emperor to his bedside. But Hadrian was physician enough to see that he was well, and even if he should allow himself to be deceived, he, Antinous, was a deceiver. This thought filled him with horror of himself and with dread for the future, and yet it was the only plan that gave any hope of success. And even when he sprang to his feet and walked hastily up and down among the out-houses he could hit upon no other scheme. And how fast the minutes flew! The third hour after midnight must be quite close at hand, and he had scarcely left himself time to rush back into the palace, throw himself on his couch, and call Mastor. Quite bewildered with agitation and tottering like a drunken man he hastened back into the old tower where he had left his torch leaning against the wall and looked up the stone stairs; it suddenly flashed through his mind that he might go up again to fling himself down them. What did he care for his miserable life.

His fall, his cry, would bring the Emperor down from his observatory and he knew that he would not leave his bleeding favorite uncared for and untended he could count upon that. And if then Hadrian watched by his bed it would be that, perhaps, of a dying man, but not of a deceiver. Fully determined on extreme measures, he tightened the girdle which held his chiton above his hips and once more went out into the night to judge by the stars what hour it was. He saw the slender sickle of the waning moon-the same moon which at the full had been mirrored in the sea when he had gone into the water to save Selene. The image of the pale girl rose before him, tangibly distinct. He felt as if he held her once more in his arms—saw her once more lying on her bed-could once more press his lips to her cold brow. Then the vision vanished; instead he was possessed by a wild desire to see her, and he said to himself that he could not die without having seen her once more.

Page 35

He looked about him in indecision. Before him lay one of the largest of the storehouses that surrounded the tower. With his torch in one hand he went in at the open door. In the large shed lay the chests and cases, the hemp, linseed, straw and matting that had been used in packing the vessels and works of art with which the palace had been newly furnished. This he knew; and now, looking up at the stars once more and seeing that the second hour after midnight had almost run to an end, a fearful thought flashed through his mind, and without daring to consider, he flung the torch into the open shed, crammed to the roof with inflammable materials, and stood motionless, with his arms crossed, to watch through the door of the shed the rapidly spreading flame, the soaring smoke, the struggle and mingling of the noiseless wreaths of black vapor from the various combustibles with the ruddy light, the victory of the fire and the leaping flames as they flew upward.

The roof, thatched with palm-leaves and reeds, had begun to crackle when Antinous rushed into the tower only a few paces off crying: "Fire—fire!" and up the stairs which led to the observatory of the imperial stargazer.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Youth has a right to go astray now and then
Feeling themselves oppressed by the benevolence

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