

Serapis — Volume 02 eBook

Serapis — Volume 02 by Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER V.

Karnis and his two companions were a long time away. Dada had almost forgotten her wish to see the young soldier once more, and after playing with little Papias for some time, as she might have played with a dog, she began to feel dull and to think the quiet of the boat intolerable. The sun was sinking when the absentees returned, but she at once reminded Karnis that he had promised to take her for a walk and show her Alexandria. Herse, however, forbid her going on such an expedition till the following day. Dada, who was more irritable and fractious than usual, burst into tears, flung the distaff that her foster-mother put into her hand over the side of the ship, and declared between her sobs that she was not a slave, that she would run away and find happiness wherever it offered. In short she was so insubordinate that Herse lost patience and scolded her severely. The girl sprang up, flung on a handkerchief and in a moment would have crossed the plank to the shore; Karnis, however, held her back.

"Why, child," he said, "do you not see how tired I am?" The appeal had its effect; Dada recovered her reason and tried to look up brightly, but her eyes were still tearful and heavy and she could only creep away into a corner and cry in silence. The old man's heart was very soft towards the girl; he would have been glad only to speak a few kind words to her and smoothe down her hair; however, he made an effort, and whispering a few words to his wife said he was ready, if Dada wished it, to take her as far as the Canopic way and the Bruchium.

Dada laughed with delight, wiped away her tears, flung her arms round the musician's neck and kissed his brown cheeks, exclaiming:

"You are the best of them all! Make haste, and Agne shall come too; she must see something of the city."

But Agne preferred to remain on board, so Karnis and Dada set out together. Orpheus followed them closely for, though the troops had succeeded in quelling the uproar, the city was still in a state of ferment. Closely veiled, and without any kind of adornment—on this Herse had positively insisted—the girl, clinging to the old man's arm, made her way through the streets, asking questions about everything she saw; and her spirits rose, and she was so full of droll suggestions that Karnis soon forgot his fatigue and gave himself up to the enjoyment of showing her the old scenes that he knew and the new beauties and improvements.

In the Canopic way Dada was fairly beside herself with delight. Houses like palaces stood arrayed on each side. Close to the buildings ran a covered arcade, and down the centre of the roadway there was a broad footpath shaded by sycamores. This fine avenue swarmed with pedestrians, while on each side chariots, drawn by magnificent

horses, hurried past, and riders galloped up and down; at every step there was something new and interesting to be seen.

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Rome, even, could not boast of a handsomer street, and Dada expressed her delight with frank eagerness; but Karnis did not echo her praises; he was indignant at finding that the Christians had removed a fine statue of the venerable Nile-god surrounded by the playful forms of his infant children, which had formerly graced the fountain in the middle of the avenue, and had also overthrown or mutilated the statues of Hermes that had stood by the roadside. Orpheus sympathized in his wrath which reached its climax when, on looking for two statues, of Demeter and of Pallas Athene, of which Karnis had spoken to his son as decorating the gateway of one of the finest houses in the city, they beheld instead, mounted on the plinths, two coarsely-wrought images of the Lamb with its Cross.

"Like two rats that have been caught under a stone!" cried the old man. "And what is most shameful is that I would wager that they have destroyed the statues which were the pride of the town and thrown them on a rubbish heap. In my day this house belonged to a rich man named Philippus. But stop—was not he the father of our hospitable protector . . ."

"The steward spoke of Porphyrius as the son of Philippus," Orpheus said.

"And Philippus was a corn merchant, too," added Karnis. "Demeter was figurative of a blessing on the harvest, for it was from that the house derived its wealth, and Pallas Athene was patroness of the learning that was encouraged by its owners. When I was a student here every wealthy man belonged to some school of philosophy. The money-bag did not count for everything. Heathen or Jew, whether engaged in business or enjoying the revenues of an inherited fortune, a man was expected to be able to talk of something besides the price of merchandise and the coming and sailing of vessels."

During this conversation Dada had withdrawn her hand from the old man's arm to raise her veil, for two men had gone up to the gate between the images that had roused Karnis to wrath, and one of them, who at this instant knocked at the door, was Mary's son.

"Father, see, there he is!" cried Dada, as the door was opened, speaking louder than was at all necessary to enable her companion to hear her; the musician at once recognized Marcus, and turning to his son he said:

"Now we may be quite sure! Porphyrius and this young Christian's father were brothers. Philippus must have left his house to his eldest son who is the one that is dead, and it now belongs no doubt to Mary, his widow. I must admit, child, that you choose your adorers from respectable families!"

"I should think so," said the girl laughing. "And that is why he is so proud. My fine gentleman has not even a glance to cast at us. Bang! the door is shut. Come along, uncle!"

The young man in question entered the hall of his father's house with his companion and paused there to say in a tone of pressing entreaty: "Only come and speak with my mother; you really must not leave like this."

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"How else?" said the other roughly. "You stick to your way, I will go mine. You can find a better steward for the estate—I go to-morrow. May the earth open and swallow me up if I stay one hour longer than is absolutely necessary in this demented place. And after all Mary is your mother and not mine."

"But she was your father's wife," retorted Marcus.

"Certainly, or you would not be my brother. But she—I have amply repaid any kindness she ever did me by ten years of service. We do not understand each other and we never shall."

"Yes, yes, you will indeed. I have been in church and prayed—nay, do not laugh—I prayed to the Lord that he would make it all work right and He—well, you have been baptized and made one of His flock."

"To my misfortune! You drive me frantic with your meek and mild ways," cried the other passionately. "My own feet are strong enough for me to stand on and my hand, though it is horny, can carry out what my brain thinks right."

"No, no, Demetrius, no. You see, you believe in the old gods. . ."

"Certainly," said the other with increasing irritation. "You are merely talking to the winds, and my time is precious. I must pack up my small possessions, and for your sake I will say a few words of farewell when I take the account-books to your mother. I have land enough belonging to myself alone, at Arsinoe; I know my own business and am tired of letting a woman meddle and mar it. Good-bye for the present, youngster. Tell your mother I am coming; I shall be with her in just an hour."

"Demetrius!" cried the lad trying once more to detain his brother; but Demetrius freed himself with a powerful wrench and hurried across the court-yard—gay with flowers and with a fountain in the middle—into which the apartments of the family opened, his own among the number.

Marcus looked after him sadly; they differed too widely in thought and feeling ever to understand each other completely, and when they stood side by side no one would have imagined that they were the sons of one father, for even in appearance they were strongly dissimilar. Marcus was slight and delicate, Demetrius, on the contrary, broad-shouldered and large-boned.

After this parting from his half-brother Marcus betook himself to the women's rooms where Mary, after superintending the spinning and other work of the slave-girls, in the rooms at the back, was wont to sit during the evening. He found his mother in eager conversation with a Christian priest of advanced age, an imposing personage of gentle and dignified aspect. The widow, though past forty, might still pass for a handsome



woman: it was from her that her son had inherited his tall, thin figure with narrow shoulders and a slight stoop, his finely-cut features, white skin and soft, flowing, raven-black hair. Their resemblance was rendered all the more striking by the fact that each wore a simple, narrow circlet of gold-round the head; nay it would have seemed some unusual trick of Nature's but that their eyes were quite unlike. Hers were black, and their gaze was shrewd and sharp and sometimes sternly hard; while the dreamy lustre of her son's, which were blue, lent his face an almost feminine softness.

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She must have been discussing some grave questions with the old man, for, as the young man entered the room, she colored slightly and her long, taper fingers impatiently tapped the back of the couch on which she was lounging.

Marcus kissed first the priest's hand and then his mother's, and, after enquiring with filial anxiety after her health, informed her that Demetrius would presently be coming to take leave of her.

"How condescending?" she said coldly. "You know reverend Father what it is that I require of him and that he refuses. His peasants—always his peasants! Now can you tell me why they, who must feel the influence and power of their masters so much more directly than the lower class in towns, they, whose weal or woe so obviously depends on the will of the Most High, are so obstinately set against the Gospel of Salvation?"

"They cling to what they are used to," replied the old man. "The seed they sow bore fruit under the old gods; and as they cannot see nor handle our Heavenly Father as they can their idols, and at the same time have nothing better to hope for than a tenth or a twentieth of the grain. . ."

"Yes, mine and thine—the miserable profit of this world!" sighed the widow. "Oh! Demetrius can defend the idolatry of his favorites warmly enough, never fear. If you can spare the time, good Father, stay and help me to convince him."

"I have already stayed too long," replied the priest, "for the Bishop has commanded my presence. I should like to speak to you, my dear Marcus; to-morrow morning, early, will you come to me? The Lord be with you, beloved!"

He rose, and as he gave Mary his hand she detained him a moment signing to her son to leave them, and said in a low tone:

"Marcus must not suspect that I know of the error into which he has been led; speak roundly to his conscience, and as to the girl, I will take her in hand. Will it not be possible for Theophilus to grant me an interview?"

"Hardly, at present," replied the priest. "As you know, Cynegius is here and the fate of the Bishop and of our cause hangs on the next few days. Give up your ambitious desires I beseech you, daughter, for even if Theophilus were to admit you I firmly believe, nay—do not be angry— I can but hope that he would never give way on this point."

"No?" said the widow looking down in some embarrassment; but when her visitor was gone she lifted her head with a flash of wilful defiance.

She then made Marcus, who had on the previous day given her a full account of his voyage from Rome, tell her all that had passed between himself and Demetrius; she

asked him how he liked his horse, whether he hoped to win the approaching races, and generally what he had been doing and was going to do. But it did not escape her notice that Marcus was more reticent than usual and that he tried to bring the conversation round to his voyage and to the guests in the Xenodochium; however, she always stopped him, for she knew what he was aiming at and would not listen to anything on that subject.

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It was not till long after the slaves had lighted the three-branched silver lamps that Demetrius appeared. His stepmother received him kindly and began to talk on indifferent subjects; but he replied with ill-disguised impatience, for he had not come to chatter and gossip. She fully understood this; but it pleased her to check and provoke him and she did it in a way which vividly reminded him of his early days, of the desolation and unhappiness that had blighted his young life when this woman had taken the place of his own tender gentle mother, and come between him and his father. Day after day, in that bygone time, she had received him just as she had this evening: with words that sounded kindly, but with a cold, unloving heart. He knew that she had always seen his boyish errors and petty faults in the worst light, attributing them to bad propensities and innate wickedness, that she had injured him in his father's eyes by painting a distorted image of his disposition and doings—and all these sins he could not forgive her. At the time of his father's assassination Demetrius was already grown to man's estate, and as the eldest son it would have been his right and duty to take part with his uncle Porphyrius in the management of the business; but he could not endure the idea of living in the same place with his stepmother, so, having a pronounced taste for a country life, he left the widow in possession of the house in the Canopic street, persuaded his uncle to pay over his father's share in the business in hard cash and then had quitted Alexandria to take entire charge of the family estates in Cyrenaica. In the course of a few years he had become an admirable farmer; the landowners throughout the province were glad to take his advice or follow his example, and the accounts which he now laid on the table by the side of Mary's couch—three goodly rolls—proved by the irrefragable evidence of figures that he had actually doubled their revenues from the estates of which he had been the manager. He had earned his right to claim his independence, to persist in his own determinations and to go his own way; he was animated by the pride of an independent nature that recklessly breaks away from a detested tie when it has means at command either to rest without anxiety or to devote its energies to new enterprise.

When Demetrius had allowed his stepmother time enough for subjects in which he took no interest, he laid his hand on the account-books and abruptly observed that it was now time to talk seriously. He had already explained to Marcus that he could no longer undertake to meet her requirements; and as, with him, to decide was to act, he wished at once to come to a decision as to whether he should continue to manage the family estates in the way he thought proper, or should retire and devote himself to the care of his own land. If Mary accepted the latter alternative he would at once cancel their deed of agreement, but even then he was very willing to stay on for a time in Cyrenaica, and put the new steward, when she had appointed one, in the way of performing his onerous duties. After that he would have nothing more to do with the family estates. This was his last word; and whichever way she decided, they might part without any final breach, which he was anxious to avoid if only for the sake of Marcus.

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Demetrius spoke gravely and calmly; still, the bitterness that filled his soul imparted a flavor to his speech that did not escape the widow, and she replied with some emphasis that she should be very sorry to think that any motives personal to herself had led to his decision; she owed much, very much, to his exertions and had great pleasure in expressing her obligations. He was aware, of course, that the property he had been managing had been purchased originally partly with her fortune and partly out of her husband's pocket, and that half of it was therefore hers and half of it the property of Marcus and himself; but that by her husband's will the control and management were hers absolutely. She had endeavored to carry out the intentions of her deceased husband by entrusting the stewardship of the estate to Demetrius while he was still quite young; under his care the income had increased, and she had no doubt that in the future he might achieve even greater results; at the same time, the misunderstandings that the whole business had given rise to were not to be endured, and must positively be put an end to, even if their income were to diminish by half.

"I," she exclaimed, "am a Christian, with my whole heart and soul. I have dedicated my body and life to the service of my Saviour. What shall all the treasures of the world profit me if I lose my soul; and that, which is my immortal part, must inevitably perish if I allow my pockets to be filled by the toil of heathen peasants and slaves. I therefore must insist—and on this point I will not yield a jot—that our slaves in Cyrenaica, a flock of more than three thousand erring sheep, shall either submit to be baptized or be removed to make way for Christians."

"That is to say . . ." began Demetrius hastily.

"I have not yet done," she interrupted. "So far as the peasants are concerned who rent and farm our land they all, without exception—as you said yesterday—are stiff-necked idolaters. We must give them time to think it over, but the annual agreement will not be renewed with any who will not pledge themselves to give up the old sacrifices and to worship the Redeemer. If they submit they will be safe—in this world and the next; if they refuse they must go, and the land must be let to Christians in their stead."

"Just as I change this seat for another!" said Demetrius with a laugh, and lifting up a heavy bronze chair he flung it down again on the hard mosaic pavement so that the floor shook.

Maria started violently.

"My body may tremble," she said in great excitement, "but my soul is firm when its everlasting bliss is at stake. I insist—and my representative, whether he be you or another, must carry my orders into effect without an hour's delay—I insist that every heathen shrine, every image of the field and garden-gods, every altar and sacred stone which the heathens use for their idolatrous practices shall be pulled down, overthrown, mutilated and destroyed. That is what I require and insist on."

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"And that is what I will never consent to," cried Demetrius in a voice like low thunder. "I cannot and will not. These things have been held precious and sacred to men for thousands of years and I cannot, will not, blow them off the face of the earth, as you blow a feather off your cloak. You may go and do it yourself; you may be able to achieve it."

"What do you mean?" asked Mary drawing herself up with a glance of indignant protest.

"Yes—if any one can do it you can!" repeated Demetrius imperturbably. "I went to-day to seek the images of our forefathers—the venerable images that were clear to our infancy, the portraits of our fathers' fathers and mothers, the founders of the honor of our race. And where are they? They have gone with the protectors of our home, the pride and ornament of this house—of the street, of the city—the Hermes and Pallas Athene that you—you flung into the lime-kiln. Old Phabis told me with tears in his eyes. Alas poor house that is robbed of its past, of its glory, and of its patron deities!"

"I have placed it under a better safeguard," replied Maria in a tremulous voice, and she looked it Marcus with an appeal for sympathy. "Now, for the last time, I ask you: Will you accede to my demands or will you not?"

"I will not," said Demetrius resolutely.

"Then I must find a new agent to manage the estates."

"You will soon find one; but your land—which is our land too—will become a desert. Poor land! If you destroy its shrines and sanctuaries you will destroy its soul; for they are the soul of the land. The first inhabitants gathered round the sanctuary, and on that sanctuary and the gods that dwell there the peasant founds his hopes of increase on what he sows and plants, and of prosperity for his wife and children and cattle and all that he has. In destroying his shrines you ruin his hopes, and with them all the joy of life. I know the peasant; he believes that his labors must be vain if you deprive him of the gods that make it thrive. He sows in hope, in the swelling of the grain he sees the hand of the gods who claim his joyful thanksgiving after the harvest is gathered in. You are depriving him of all that encourages and uplifts and rejoices his soul when you ruin his shrines and altars!"

"But I give him other and better ones," replied Mary.

"Take care then that they are such as he can appreciate," said Demetrius gravely.

"Persuade him to love, to believe, to hope in the creed you force upon him; but do not rob him of what he trusts in before he is prepared to accept the substitute you offer him. —Now, let me go; we are neither of us in the temper to make the best arrangements for the future. One thing, at any rate, is certain: I have nothing more to do with the estate."

CHAPTER VI.

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After leaving his stepmother Demetrius made good use of his time and dictated a number of letters to his secretary, a slave he had brought with him to Alexandria, for the use of the pen was to him unendurable labor. The letters were on business, relating to his departure from Cyrenaica and his purpose of managing his own estates for the future, and when they lay before him, finished, rolled up and sealed, he felt that he had come to a mile-stone on his road, a landmark in his life. He paced the room in silence, trying to picture to himself the fate of the slaves and peasants who, for so many years, had been his faithful servants and fellow-laborers, whose confidence he had entirely won, and many of whom he truly loved. But he could not conceive of their life, their toil or their festivals, bereft of images, offerings, garlands, and hymns of rejoicing. To him they were as children, forbidden to laugh and play, and he could not help once more recurring to his boyhood and the day of his going to school, when, instead of running and shouting in his father's sunny garden, he had been made to sit still and silent in a dull class-room. And now had the whole world reached such a boundary line in existence beyond which there was to be no more freedom and careless joy— where a ceaseless struggle for higher things must begin and never end?

If the Gospel were indeed true, and if all it promised could ever find fulfilment, it might perhaps be prudent to admit the sinfulness of man and to give up the joys and glories of this world to win the eternal treasure that it described. Many a good and wise man whom he had known —nay the Emperor, the great and learned Theodosius himself— was devoted heart and soul to the Christian faith, and Demetrius knew from his own experience that his mother's creed, in which he had been initiated as a boy and from which his father, after holding him at the font had perverted him at an early age, offered great consolations and enduring help to those whose existence was one of care, poverty, and suffering. But his laborers and servants? They were healthy and contented. What power on earth could induce them—a race that clung devotedly to custom—to desert the faith of their fathers, and the time-honored traditions to which they owed all the comforts and pleasures of life, or to seek in a strange creed the aid which they already believed that they possessed.

He did not repent of his determination; but he nevertheless said to himself that, when once he was gone, Mary would proceed only too soon on the work of extermination and destruction; and every temple on the estate, every statue, every whispering grotto, every shrine and stone anointed by pious hands, doomed now to perish, rose before his fancy.

Demetrius was accustomed to rise at cock-crow and go to bed at an early hour, and he was on the point of retiring even before the usual time, when Marcus came to his room and begged him to give him yet an hour.

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"You are angry with my mother," said the younger man with a look of melancholy entreaty, "but you know there is nothing that she would not sacrifice for the faith. And you can smile so bitterly! But only put yourself in my place. Loving my mother as I do, it is acutely painful to me to see another person—to see you whom I love, too, for you are my friend and brother—to see you, I say, turn your back on her so completely. My heart is heavy enough to-day I can tell you."

"Poor boy!" said the countryman. "Yes, I am truly your friend, and am anxious to remain so; you are not to blame in this business—and for that matter, I am anything but cheerful. You have chosen to say: Down with the shrines! Perish all those who do not think as we do! Still, look at the thing as you will, in some cases certainly violence must ensue—nay, if no blood is shed it will be a wonder! You sum up the matter in one common term: The heathen peasants on the estate. My view of it is totally different; I know these farmers and their wives and children, each one by name and by sight. There is not one but is ready to bid me good day and shake my hand or kiss my dress. Many a one has come to me in tears and left me happy.—By the great Zeus! no one ever accused me of being soft-hearted, but I could wish this day that I were harder; and my blood turns to gall as I ask—What is all this for—to what possible end?"

"For the sake and honor of the faith, Demetrius; for the eternal salvation of our people."

"Indeed!" retorted Demetrius with a drawl, "I know better. If that and that alone were intended you would build churches and chapels and send us worthy priests—Eusebius and the like—and would try to win men's hearts to your Lord by the love you are always talking so much about. That was my advice to your mother, only this morning. I believe the end might be attained by those means, among us as elsewhere; ultimately it will, no doubt, be gained—but not to-day nor to-morrow. A peasant, when he had become accustomed to the church and grasped a trust in the new God, would of his own accord give up the old gods and their sanctuaries; I could count you off a dozen such instances. That I could have looked on at calmly, for I want only men's arms and legs and do not ask for their souls; but to burn down the old house before you have collected wood and stone to build a new one I call wicked.—It is cruelty and madness, and when so shrewd a woman as your mother is bent on carrying through such a measure, come what may, there is something more behind it."

"You think she wants to get rid of you—you, Demetrius!" interrupted Marcus eagerly. "But you are mistaken, you are altogether wrong. What you have done for the estate . . ."

"Oh! as for that!" cried the other, "what has my work to do with all this? Ere the year is out everything that can remind us of the heathen gods is to be swept away from the hamlets and fields of the pious Mary. That is what is intended! Then they will hurry off to the Bishop with the great news and to crown one marvel with another, the reversion

will be secured of a martyr's nimbus. And this is what all this zeal is for —this and nothing else!"

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"You are speaking of my mother, remember!" cried Marcus, looking at his brother with a touching appeal in his eyes. Demetrius shook his shaggy head and spoke more temperately as he went on:

"Yes, child, I had forgotten that—and I may be mistaken of course, for I am no more than human. Here one thing follows so close on another, and in this house I feel so battered and storm-tossed, that I hardly know myself. But old Phabis tells me that steps are being seriously taken to procure the title of Martyr for our father Apelles."

"My mother is quite convinced that he died for the faith, and she loved him devotedly . . ."

"Then it is so!" cried Demetrius, grinding his teeth and thumping his fist down on the table. "The lies sown by one single man have produced a deadly weed that is smothering this miserable house! You—to be sure, what can you know of our father? I knew him; I have been present when he and his friends, the philosophers, have laughed to scorn things which not only you Christians but even pious heathen regard as sacred. Lucretius was his evangelist, and the Cosmogony of that utter atheist lay by his pillow and was his companion wherever he went."

"He admired the heathen poets, but he was a Christian all the same," replied Marcus.

"Neither more nor less than Porphyrius, our uncle, or myself," retorted his brother. "Since the day when our grandfather Philippus was baptized, wealth and happiness have deserted this house. He gave up the old gods solely that he might not lose the right of supplying the city and the Emperor with corn, and became a Christian and made his sons Christians. But he had us educated by his heathen friends, and though we passed for Christians we were not so in fact. When it was absolutely necessary he showed himself in church with us; but our daily life, our pleasures, our pastimes were heathen, and when life began for us in earnest we offered a bleeding sacrifice to the gods. It was impossible to retract honestly, since a renegade Christian returning to the worship of the old gods is incapacitated by law from making a will. You know this; and when you ask me why I am content to live alone, without either wife or child—and I love children, even those of other people—a solitary man dragging out my days and nights joylessly enough—I tell you: I am openly and honestly a worshipper of our old gods, and I will not go to church because I scorn a lie. What should I do with children who, in consequence of my retraction, must forfeit all I might leave them? It was this question of inheritance only that induced my father to have us baptized and to make a pretense of Christianity. He set out for Petra with his Lucretius in his satchel—I packed it with my own hands into his money-bag—to put in a claim to supply grain to the 'Rock city.' He was slain on his way home; most likely by his servant Anubis, who certainly knew what money he had with him, and who vanished and left

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no trace. Because—about the same time—a band of Saracens had fallen on some Christian anchorites and travellers, in the district between Petra and Aila, your mother chose to assume a right to call our father a martyr! But she knew his opinions full well, I tell you, and shed many a tear over them, too.—Now she has expended vast sums on church-building, she has opened the Xenodochium and pours her money by lavish handfuls clown the insatiable throats of monks and priests. To what end? To have her husband recognized as a martyr. Hitherto her toil and money have been wasted. In my estimation the Bishop is a perfectly detestable tyrant, and if I know him at all he will take all she will give and never grant her wish. Now she is preparing her great move, and hopes to startle him into compliance by a new marvel. She thinks that, like a juggler who turns a white egg black, she can turn a heathen district into a Christian one by a twist of her finger. Well—so far as I am concerned I will have nothing to do with the trick.”

During this harangue Marcus had alternately gazed at the floor and fixed his large eyes in anguish on his brother’s face. For some minutes he found nothing to reply, and he was evidently going through a bitter mental struggle. Demetrius spoke no more, but arranged the sheets of papyrus that strewed the table. At length Marcus, after a deep sigh, broke out in a tone of fervent conviction and with a blissful smile that lighted up his whole face:

“Poor mother! And others misunderstand her just as you do; I myself was in danger of doubting her. But I think that now I understand her perfectly. She loved my father so completely that she hopes now to win for his immortal soul the grace which he, in the flesh, neglected to strive after. He was baptized, so she longs to win, by her prayers and oblations, the mercy of the Lord who is so ready to forgive. She herself firmly believes in the martyrdom of her beloved dead, and if only the Church will rank him among those who have died for Her, he will be saved, and she will find him standing in the pure radiance of the realms above, with open arms, overflowing with fervent love and gratitude, to welcome the faithful helpmate who will have purged his soul. Yes, now I quite understand; and from this day forth I will aid and second her; the hardest task shall not be too hard, the best shall not be too good, if only we may open the gates of Heaven to my poor father’s imperilled soul.”

As he spoke his eye glistened with ecstatic light; his brother, too, was touched, and to hide his emotion, he exclaimed, more recklessly and sharply than was his wont:

“That will come all right, never fear, lad!” But he hastily wiped his eyes with his hand, slapped Marcus on the shoulder, and added gaily: “It is better to choke than to swallow down the thing you think right, and it never hurt a man yet to make a clean breast of his feelings, even if we do not quite agree we understand each other the better for it. I have my way of thinking, you have yours; thus we each know what the other means; but after

the tragedy comes the satyr play, and we may as well finish this agitating evening with an hour's friendly chat."

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So saying Demetrius stretched himself on a divan and invited Marcus to do the same, and in a few minutes their conversation had turned, as usual, to the subject of horses. Marcus was full of praises of the stallions his brother had bred for him, and which he had ridden that very day round the Myssa—[The Myssa was the Meta, or turning-post]—in the Hippodrome, and his brother added with no small complacency:

“They were all bred from the same sire and from the choicest mares. I broke them in myself, and I only wish.... But why did you not come to the stables this morning?”

“I could not,” replied Marcus coloring slightly. Then we will go to-morrow to Nicopolis and I will show you how to get Megaera past the Taraxippios.”—[The terror of the horses.]

“To-morrow?” said Marcus somewhat embarrassed. “In the morning I must go to see Eusebius and then. . . .”

“Well, then?”

“Then I must—I mean I should like. . . .”

“What?”

“Well, to be sure I might, all the same.—But no, it is not to be done—I have. . . .”

“What, what?” cried Demetrius with increasing impatience: “My time is limited and if you start the horses without knowing my way of managing them they will certainly not do their best. As soon as the market begins to fill we will set out. We shall need a few hours for the Hippodrome, then we will dine with Damon, and before dark. . . .”

“No, no,” replied Marcus, “to-morrow, certainly, I positively cannot....”

“People who have nothing to do always lack time,” replied the other. “Is to-morrow one of your festivals?”

“No, not that—and Good Heavens! If only I could. . . .”

“Could, could!” cried Demetrius angrily and standing close in front of his brother with his arms folded. “Say out honestly: ‘I will not go,’ or else, ‘my affairs are my own secret and I mean to keep it.’—But give me no more of your silly equivocations.”

His vehemence increased the younger man’s embarrassment, and as he stood trying to find an explanation which might come somewhat near the truth and yet not betray him, Demetrius, who had stood watching him closely, suddenly exclaimed:

“By Aphrodite, the daughter of the foam! it is a love affair—an assignation.—Woman, woman, always woman!”

“An assignation!” cried Marcus shaking his head. “No indeed, no one expects me; and yet—I had rather you should misunderstand me than think that I had lied. Yes—I am going to seek a woman; and if I do not find her to-morrow, if in the course of tomorrow I do not succeed in my heart’s desire, she is lost—not only to me, though I cannot give up the heavenly love for the sake of the earthly and fleshly—but to my Lord and Saviour. It is the life—the everlasting life or death of one of God’s loveliest creatures that hangs on to-morrow’s work.”

Demetrius was greatly astonished, and it was with an angry gesture of impatience that he replied:

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“Again you have overstepped the boundary within which we can possibly understand each other. In my opinion you are hardly old enough to undertake the salvation of the imperilled souls of pretty women. Take care what you are about, youngster! It is safe enough to go into the water with those who can swim, but those who sink are apt to draw you down with them. You are a good-looking young fellow, you have money and fine horses, and there are women enough who are only too ready to spread their nets abroad. . .”

“What are you thinking of?” cried Marcus passionately. “It is I who am the fisher—a fisher of souls, and so every true believer ought to be. She—she is innocence and simplicity itself, in spite of her roguish sauciness. But she has fallen into the hands of a reprobate heathen, and here, where vice prowls about the city like a roaring lion, she will be lost—lost, if I do not rescue her. Twice have I seen her in my dreams; once close to the cavern of a raging dragon, and again on the edge of a precipitous cliff, and each time an angel called out to me and bid me save her from the jaws of the monster, and from falling into the abyss. Since then I seem to see her constantly; at meals, when I am in company, when I am driving,—and I always hear the warning voice of the angel. And now I feel it a sacred duty to save her—a creature on whom the Almighty has lavished every gift he ever bestowed on the daughters of Eve—to lead her into the path of Salvation.”

Demetrius had listened to his brother’s enthusiastic speech with growing anxiety, but he merely shrugged his shoulders and said:

“I almost envy you your acquaintance with this favorite of the gods; but you might, it seems to me, postpone the work of salvation. You were away from Alexandria for half a year, and if she could hold out so long as that . . .”

“Do not speak so; you ought not to speak so!” cried Marcus, pressing his hand on his heart as though in physical pain. “But I have no time to lose, for I must at once find out where the old singer has taken her. I am not so inexperienced as you seem to think. He has brought her here to trade in her beauty, and enrich himself. Why, you, too, saw her on board ship; I, as you know, had arranged for them to be taken in at my mother’s Xenodochium.”

“Whom?” asked Demetrius folding his hands.

“The singers whom I brought with me from Ostia. And now they have disappeared from thence, and Dada . . .”

“Dada!” cried Demetrius, bursting into a loud laugh without heeding Marcus who stepped up to him, crimson with rage. “Dada! that little fair puss! You see her day and night and an angel calls upon you to save that child’s merry soul? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, boy! Why, what shall I wager now? I will stake this roll of gold

that I could make her come with me to-morrow—with me, a hard-featured countryman, freckled all over like a plover's egg, where my clothes do not protect my skin, and with hair on end like the top of a broom—yes, that she will follow me to Arsinoe or wherever I choose to bid her. Let the hussy go, you simple innocent. Such a Soul as hers is of small account even in a less exclusive Heaven than yours is."

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“Take back those words!” cried Marcus, beside himself and clenching his fist. “But that is just like you! Your impure eyes and heart defile purity itself, and see spots even in the sun. Nothing is too bad for a ‘singing girl,’ I know. But that is just the marrow of the matter; it is from that very curse that I mean to save her. If you can accuse her of anything, speak; if not, and if you do not want to appear a base slanderer in my eyes, take back the words you have just spoken!”

“Oh! I take them back of course,” said Demetrius indifferently. “I know nothing of your beauty beyond what she has herself said to me and you and Cynegius and his Secretaries—with her pretty, saucy eyes. But the language of the eye, they say, is not always to be depended on; so take it as unsaid. And, if I understood you rightly, you do not even know where the singers are hiding? If you have no objection, I will help you to seek them out.”

“That is as you please,” answered Marcus hotly. “All your mockery will not prevent my doing my duty.”

“Very right, very right,” said his brother. “Perhaps this damsel is unlike all the other singing-girls with whom I used so often to spend a jolly evening in my younger days. Once, at Barca, I saw a white raven— but perhaps after all it was only a dove. Your opinion, in this case, is at any rate better founded than mine, for I never thought twice about the girl and you did.—But it is late; till to-morrow, Marcus.”

The brothers parted for the night, but when Demetrius found himself alone he walked up and down the room, shaking his head doubtfully. Presently, when his body-slave came in to pack for him, he called out crossly:

“Let that alone—I shall stay in Alexandria a few days longer.”

Marcus could not go to bed; his brother’s scorn had shaken his soul to the foundations. An inward voice told him that his more experienced senior might be right, but at the same time he hated and condemned himself for listening to its warnings at all. The curse that rested on Dada was that of her position; she herself was pure—as pure as a lily, as pure as the heart of a child, as pure as the blue of her eyes and the ring of her voice. He would obey the angel’s behest! He could and he must save her!

In the greatest excitement he went out of the house, through the great gate, into the Canopic way, and walked on. As he was about to turn down a side street to go to the lake he found the road stopped by soldiers, for this street led past the prefect’s house where Cynegius, the Emperor’s emissary, was staying; he had come, it was said, to close the Temples, and the excited populace had gathered outside the building, during the afternoon, to signify their indignant disapprobation. At sundown an armed force had been called out and had dispersed the crowd; but it was by another road that the young Christian at length made his way to the shore.

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CHAPTER VII.

While Marcus was restlessly wandering on the shore of Mareotis, dreaming of Dada's image and arranging speeches of persuasive eloquence by which to touch her heart and appeal to her soul, silence had fallen on the floating home of the singers. A light white mist, like a filmy veil—a tissue of clouds and moonbeams—hung over the lake. Work was long since over in the ship-yard, and the huge skeletons of the unfinished ships threw weird and ghostly shadows on the silvered strand-forms like black visions of crayfish, centipedes, or enormous spiders.

From the town there came not a sound; it lay in the silence of intoxicated sleep. The Roman troops had cleared the streets, the lights were dead in every house, and in all the alleys and squares; only the moon shone over the roofs of Alexandria, while the blazing beacon of the light-house on the north-eastern point of the island of Pharos shone like a sun through the darkness.

In a large cabin in the stern of the vessel lay the two girls, on soft woollen couches and covered with rugs. Agne was gazing wide-eyed into the darkness; Dada had long been asleep, but she breathed painfully and her rosy lips were puckered now and then as if she were in some distress. She was dreaming of the infuriated mob who had snatched the garland from her hair—she saw Marcus suddenly interfere to protect her and rescue her from her persecutors—then she thought she had fallen off the gangway that led from the land to the barge, and was in the water while old Damia stood on the shore and laughed at her without trying to help her. Night generally brought the child sound sleep or pleasant dreams, but now one hideous face after another haunted her.

And yet the evening had brought her a great pleasure. Not long after their return from their walk the steward had come down to the boat and brought her a very beautiful dress, with greetings from his old mistress; he had at the same time brought an Egyptian slave-woman, well skilled in all the arts of the toilet, who was to wait upon her so long as she remained in Alexandria. Dada had never owned such a lovely dress! The under-robe was of soft sea-green bombyx silk, with a broad border, delicately embroidered, of a garland of roses and buds. The peplos was of the same color and decorated to match; costly clasps of mosaic, representing full-blown roses and set in oval gold settings, fastened it on the shoulders. In a separate case were a gold girdle, a bracelet, also of gold, in the shape of a snake, a gold crescent with a rose, like those on the shoulder-clasps, in its centre, and a metal mirror of spotless lustre.

The slave, a middle-aged woman with a dark cunning face, had helped her to put on this new garment; she had also insisted on dressing her hair, and all the time had never ceased praising the charms that nature had bestowed on her young mistress, with the zeal of a lover.

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Agne had looked on smiling, good-naturedly handing the slave the pins and ribbands she had needed, and sincerely rejoicing in her companion's beauty and delight.

At last Dada had made her appearance in the deckroom and was greeted by many an Ah! and Oh! of admiration from the men of the party, including Medius, the singer whom Karnis had met in the street. Even Herse, who had received her quite disagreeably on her return from the city, could not suppress a smile of kindly approval, though she shook her finger at her saying:

"The old lady has set her heart on turning your head completely I see. All that is very pretty, but all the good it will do will be to rouse spiteful tongues. Remember, Dada, that you are my sister's child; I promise you I shall not forget it, and I shall keep my eye upon you."

Orpheus made haste to light every lamp and taper, of which there were plenty, for the barge was handsomely furnished, and when Dada was plainly visible in the brilliant illumination Karnis exclaimed:

"You look like a senator's daughter! Long live the Fair!"

She ran up to him and kissed him; but when Orpheus walked all round her, examining the fineness of the tissue and the artistic finish of the clasps, and even turned the snake above her round elbow, she sharply bid him let her be.

Medius, a man of the age of Karnis who had formerly been his intimate companion, never took his eyes off the girl, and whispered to the old musician that Dada would easily carry off the palm for beauty in Alexandria, and that with such a jewel in his keeping he might recover wealth and position and by quite honest means. At his suggestion she then assumed a variety of attitudes; she stood as Hebe, offering nectar to the gods—as Nausicae, listening to the tale of Odysseus—and as Sappho, singing to her lyre. The girl was delighted at all this, and when Medius, who kept close to her, tried to persuade her to perform in a similar manner in the magical representations at the house of Posidonius, before a select company of spectators, she clapped her hands exclaiming:

"You took me all round the city, father, and as your reward I should like to earn back your pretty vineyards, I should stand like this, you know, and like this—to be stared at. I only hope I might not be seized with a sudden impulse to make a face at the audience. But if they did not come too close I really might . . ."

"You could do no better than to play the parts that Posidonius might give you," interrupted Medius. "His audiences like to see good daemons, the kindly protecting spirits, and so forth. You would have to appear among clouds behind a transparent veil, and the people would hail you with acclamations or even raise their hands in adoration."

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All this seemed to Dada perfectly delightful, and she was on the point of giving her hand to Medius in token of agreement, when her eye caught the anxious gaze of the young Christian girl who stood before her with a deep flush on her face. Agne seemed to be blushing for her. The color rushed to her own cheeks, and shortly saying: "No—after all, I think not," she turned her back on the old man and threw herself on the cushions close to where the wine-jug was standing. Medius now began to besiege Karnis and Herse with arguments, but they refused all his offers as they intended quitting Alexandria in a few days, so he had no alternative but to submit. Still, he did not altogether throw up the game, and to win Dada's consent, at any rate, he made her laugh with a variety of comical pranks and showed her some ingenious conjuring tricks, and ere long their floating home echoed with merriment, with the clinking of wine-cups and with songs, in which even Agne was obliged to take part. Medius did not leave till near midnight and Herse then sent them all to bed.

As soon as the slave had undressed her young mistress and left the girls alone, Dada threw herself into the arms of Agne who was on the point of getting into bed, and kissed her vehemently, exclaiming: "You are much— so much better than I! How is that you always know what is right?"

Then she lay down; but before she fell asleep she once more spoke to Agne: "Marcus will find us out, I am certain," she said, "and I should really like to know what he has to say to me."

In a few minutes sleep had sealed her eyes, but the Christian girl lay awake; her thoughts would not rest, and Sleep, who the night before had taken her to his heart, to-night would not come near her pillow; so much to agitate and disturb her soul had taken place during the day.

She had often before now been a silent spectator of the wild rejoicings of the musician's family, and she had always thought of these light-hearted creatures as spendthrifts who waste all their substance in a few days to linger afterwards through years of privation and repentance. Troubled, as she could not fail to be, as to the eternal salvation of these lost souls, though happy in her own faith, she had constantly turned for peace to her Saviour and always found it; but to-night it was not so, for a new and unexpected temptation had sprung up for her in the house of Porphyrius.

She had heard Gorgo sing again, and joined her own voice with hers. Dirges, yearning hymns, passionate outpourings in praise of the mighty and beautiful divinity had filled her ear and stirred her soul with an ecstatic thrill, although she knew that they, were the composition of heathen poets and had first been sung to the harmony of lutes by reprobate idolaters. And yet, and yet they had touched her heart, and moved her soul to rapture, and filled her eyes with tears.

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She could not but confess to herself that she could have given no purer, sweeter, or loftier expression to her own woes, thankfulness, aspirations, and hopes of ever lasting life and glory, than this gifted creature had given to the utterance of her idolatry. Surprise, unrest, nay, some little jealousy had been mingled with her delight at Gorgo's singing. How was it that this heathen could feel and utter emotions which she had always conceived of as the special privilege of the Christian, and, for her own part, had never felt so fervently as in the hours when she had drawn closest to her Lord? Were not her own sentiments the true and right ones; had her intercourse with these heathens tainted her?

This doubt disturbed her greatly; it must be based on something more than mere self-torture, for she had not once thought of asking to whom the two-part hymn, with its tender appeal, was addressed, when Karnis had first gone through it with her alone; nor even subsequently, when she had sung it with Gorgo—timidly at first, more boldly the second time, and finally without a mistake, but carried completely away by the beauty and passion of the emotions it expressed.

She knew now, for Karnis himself had told her. It was the Lament of Isis for her—lost husband and brother—oh that horrible heathen confusion!— The departed Osiris. The wailing widow, who called on him to return with “the silent speech of tears,” was that queen of the idolater's devils whose shameful worship her father had often spoke of with horror. Still, this dirge was so true and noble, so penetrated with fervent, agonized grief, that it had gone to her heart. The sorrowing Mother of God, Mary herself, might thus have besought the resurrection of her Son; just thus must the “God-like maid”—as she was called in the Arian confession of her father—have uttered her grief, her prayers, and her longings.

But it was all a heathen delusion, all the trickery and jugglery of the Devil, though she had failed to see through it, and had given herself up to it, heart and soul. Nay, worse! for after she had learnt that Gorgo was to represent Isis and she herself Nephthys, the sister of the divine pair, she had opposed the suggestion but feebly, even though she knew that they were to sing the hymn together in the Temple of Isis; and when Gorgo had clasped her in her arms with sisterly kindness, begging her not to spoil her plans but to oblige her in this, she had not repulsed the tempter with firm decision, but merely asked for time to think it over.

How indeed could she have found the heart to refuse the noble girl, whose beauty and voice had so struck and fascinated her, when she flung her arms round her neck, looked into her eyes and earnestly besought her:

“Do it for my sake, to please me. I do not ask you to do anything wicked. Pure song is acceptable to every god. Think of your lament, if you like, as being for your own god who suffered on the cross. But I like singing with you so much; say yes. Do not refuse, for my sake!”

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She had thrown her arms so gladly, so much too gladly round the heathen lady—for she had a loving heart and no one else had ever made it a return in kind—and clinging closely to her she had said:

“As you will; I will do whatever you like.”

Then Orpheus, too, had urged her to oblige Gorgo, and himself, and all of them; and it had seemed almost impossible to refuse the first request that the modest youth—to whom she would willingly have granted anything and everything—had ever made. Still, she had held back; and in her anxious bewilderment, not daring to think or act, she had tried every form of excuse and postponement. She would probably have been awkward enough about this, but Gorgo was content to press her no further, and when, after leaving the house, she had summoned up courage to refuse to enter the Temple of Isis, Karnis had only said: “Be thankful that this gifted lady, the favorite of the Muses, should think you worthy to sing with her. We will see about the rest by-and-bye.”

Now, in the watches of the sleepless night, she saw clearly the abyss above which she was standing. She, like Judas, was on the point of betraying her Saviour; not indeed for money, but in obedience to the transient sound of an earthly voice, for the pleasure of exercising her art, to indulge a hastily-formed liking; nay, perhaps because it satisfied her childish vanity to find herself put on an equality with a lady of rank and wealth, and matched with a singer who had roused Karnis and Orpheus to such ardent admiration.

She was an enigma to herself; while passages out of the Bible crowded on her memory to reproach her conscience.

There lay Dada’s embroidered dress. Worn for the first time this day, in a month it would be unpresentably shabby and then, ere long, flung aside as past wearing. Like this—just like this—was every earthly pleasure, every joy of this brief existence. Alas, she certainly was not happy here in Karnis’ sense of the word; but in the other world there were joys eternal, and she had only to deny herself the petty enjoyments of this life to secure unfailing and everlasting happiness in the next. There she would find an endless flow of all her soul could desire, there perhaps she might be allowed to cool the lips of Gorgo, as Lazarus cooled those of the rich man.

She was quite clear now what her answer would be to-morrow, and, firmly resolved not to allow herself to think of singing in the Temple of Isis, she at last fell asleep just as the light began to dawn in the east. She did not wake till late, and it was with downcast eyes and set lips that she went with Karnis and Orpheus to the house of Porphyrius.

CHAPTER VIII.

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When the steward went to summons the musicians to his master's house he had again had no bidding for Dada, and she was very indignant at being left behind. "That old cornsack's daughter," she said, "was full of her airs, and would have nothing to say to them excepting to make use of them for her own purposes!" If she had not been afraid of being thought intrusive she would have acted on old Damia's invitation to visit her frequently, and have made her appearance, in defiance of Gorgo, dropping like a shooting-star into the midst of their practising. It never occurred to her to fancy that the young lady had any personal dislike to her, for, though she might be ignored and forgotten, who had ever had any but a kind word for her. At the same time she assumed the right of feeling that "she could not bear" the haughty Gorgo, and as the party set out she exclaimed to Agne, "Well, you need not kill her for me, but at any rate, I send her no greeting; it is a shame that I should be left to mope alone with Herse. Do not be surprised if you find me turned to a stark, brown mummy—for we are in Egypt, you know, the land of mummies. I bequeath my old dress to you, my dear, for I know you would never put on the new one. If you bewail me as you ought I will visit you in a dream, and put a sugarplum in your mouth—a cake of ambrosia such as the gods eat. You are not even leaving me Papias to tease!"

For in fact Agne's little brother, dressed in a clean garment, was to be taken to Gorgo who had expressed a wish to see him.

When they had all left the ship Dada soon betrayed how superficial her indignation had been; for, presently spying through the window of the cabin the young cavalry officer's grey-bearded father, she sprang up the narrow steps—barefoot as she was accustomed to be when at home—and threw herself on a cushion to lean over the gunwale of the upper deck, which was shaded by a canvas awning, to watch the ship-yard and the shore-path. Before she had begun to weary of this occupation the waiting-slave, who had been up to the house to put various matters in order, came back to the vessel, and squatting down at her feet was ready to give her all the information she chose to require. Dada's first questions naturally related to Gorgo. The young mistress, said the slave, had already dismissed many suitors, the sons of the greatest families of Alexandria, and if her suspicions—those of Sachepris, the slave—were well founded, all for the sake of the old shipbuilder's son, whom she had known from childhood and who was now an officer in the Imperial guard. However, as she opined, this attachment could hardly lead to marriage, since Constantine was a zealous Christian and his family were immeasurably beneath that of Porphyrius in rank; and though he had distinguished himself greatly and risen to the grade of Prefect, Damia, who on all occasions had the casting-vote, had quite other views for her granddaughter.

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All this excited Dada's sympathies to the highest pitch, but she listened with even greater attention when her gossip began to speak of Marcus, his mother, and his brother. In this the Egyptian slave was the tool of old Damia. She had counted on being questioned about the young Christian, and as soon as Dada mentioned his name she shuffled on her knees close up to the girl, laid her hand gently on her arm and looking up into her eyes with a meaning flash, she whispered in broken Greek—and hastily, for Herse was bustling about the deck: "Such a pretty mistress, such a young mistress as you, and kept here like a slave! If the young mistress only chose she could easily—quite easily—have as good a lover as our Gorgo, and better; so pretty and so young! And I know some one who would dress the pretty mistress in red gold and pale pearls and bright jewels, if sweet Dada only said the word."

"And why should sweet Dada not say the word?" echoed the girl gaily. "Who is it that has so many nice things and all for me? You—I shall never remember your name if I live to be as old as Damia. . . ."

"Sachepris, Sachepris is my name," said the woman, but call me anything else you like. The lover I mean is the son of the rich Christian, Mary. A handsome man, my lord Marcus; and he has horses, such fine horses, and more gold pieces than the pebbles on the shore there. Sachepris knows that he has sent out slaves to look for the pretty mistress. Send him a token—write to my lord Marcus."

"Write?" laughed Dada. "Girls learn other things in my country; but if I could—shall I tell you something? I would not write him a line. Those who want me may seek me!"

"He is seeking, he is trying to find the pretty mistress," declared the woman; "he is full of you, quite full of you, and if I dared...."

"Well?"

"I would go and say to my lord Marcus, quite in a secret. . . ."

"Well, what? Speak out, woman."

"First I would tell him where the pretty mistress is hidden; and then say that he might hope once—this evening perhaps—he is not far off, he is quite near this. . . over there; do you see that little white house? It is a tavern and the host is a freedman attached to the lady Damia, and for money he would shut his shop up for a day, for a night, for many days.—Well, and then I would say—shall I tell you all? My lord Marcus is there, waiting for his pretty mistress, and has brought her dresses that would make the rose-garment look a rag. You would have gold too, as much gold as heart can wish. I can take you there, and he will meet you with open arms."

“What, this evening?” cried Dada, and the blue veins swelled on her white forehead. “You hateful, brown serpent! Did Gorgo teach you such things as this? It is horrible, disgraceful, sickening!”

So base a proposal was the last thing she would ever have expected from Marcus—of all men in the world, Marcus, whom she had imagined so good and pure! She could not believe it; and as her glance met the cunning glitter of the Egyptian’s eyes her own sparkled keenly, and she exclaimed with a vehemence and decision which her attendant had never suspected in her:

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"It is deceit and falsehood from beginning to end! Go, woman, I will hear no more of it. Why should Marcus have come to you since yesterday if he does not know where I am? You are silent—you will not say?.... Oh! I understand it all. He—I know he would never have ventured it. But it is your 'noble lady Damia'—that old woman, who has told you what to say. You are her echo, and as for Marcus ... Confess, confess at once, you witch . . ."

"Sachepris is only a poor slave," said the woman raising her hands in entreaty. "Sachepris can only obey, and if the pretty mistress were to tell my lady Damia . . ."

"It was she then who sent for me to go to the little tavern?"

The woman nodded. "And Marcus?"

"If the pretty mistress had consented . . ."

"Well?"

"Then—but Great Isis! if you tell of me!"

"I will not tell; go on."

"I should have gone to my lord Marcus and invited him, from you . . ."

"It is shameful!" interrupted Dada, and a shudder ran through her slight frame. "How cruel, how horrible it is! You—you will stay here till the others come home and then you will go home to the old woman. I thank the gods, I have two hands and need no maid to wait upon me! But look there—what is the meaning of that? That pretty litter has stopped and there is an old man signing to you."

"It is the widow Mary's house steward," whined the woman, while Dada turned pale, wondering what a messenger from Marcus' mother could want here.

Herse, who had kept a watchful eye on the landing-plank, on Dada's account, had also seen the approach of the widow's messenger and suspected a love-message from Marcus; but she was utterly astounded when the old man politely but imperiously desired her—Herse to get into the litter which would convey her to his mistress's house. Was this a trap? Did he merely want to tempt her from the vessel so as to clear the way for his young master? No—for he handed her a tablet on which there was a written message, and she, an Alexandrian, had been well educated and could read:

"Mary, the widow of Apelles, to the wife of Karnis, the singer." And then followed the same urgent request as she had already received by word of mouth. To reassure herself entirely she called the slave-woman aside, and asked her whether Phabis was indeed a trust worthy servant of the widow's. Evidently there was no treason to be



apprehended and she must obey the invitation, though it disturbed her greatly; but she was a cautious woman, with not only her heart but her brains and tongue in the right place, and she at once made up her mind what must be done under the circumstances. While she gave a few decorative touches to her person she handed the tablet to the waiting-woman, whom she had taken into her own room, and desired her to carry it at once to her husband, and tell him whither she had

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gone, and to beg him to return without delay to take care of Dada. But what if her husband and son could not come away? The girl would be left quite alone, and then. . . The picture rose before her anxious mind of Marcus appearing on the scene and tempting Dada on shore—of her niece stealing away by herself even, if the young Christian failed to discover her present residence—loitering alone along the Canopic way or the Bruclumn, where, at noon, all that was most disreputable in Alexandria was to be seen at this time of year—she saw, shuddered, considered—and suddenly thought of an expedient which seemed to promise an issue from the difficulty. It was nothing new and a favorite trick among the Egyptians; she had seen it turned to account by a lame tailor at whose house her father had lodged, when he had to go out to his customers and leave his young negress wife alone at home. Dada was lying barefoot on the deck: Herse would hide her shoes.

She hastily acted on this idea, locking up not only Dada's sandals, but also Agne's and her own, in the trunk they had saved; a glance at the slave's feet assured her that hers could be of no use.

"Not if fire were to break out," thought she, "would my Dada be seen in the streets with those preposterous things on her pretty little feet."

When this was done Herse breathed more freely, and as she took leave of her niece, feeling perhaps that she owed her some little reparation, she said in an unusually kind tone:

"Good bye, child. Try to amuse yourself while I am gone. There is plenty to look at here, and the others will soon be back again. If the city is fairly quiet this evening we will all go out together, to Canopus, to eat oysters. Good bye till we meet again, my pet!" She kissed the child, who looked up at her in astonishment, for her adopted mother was not usually lavish of such endearments.

Before long Dada was alone, cooling herself with her new fan and eating sweetmeats; but she could not cease thinking of the shameful treachery planned by old Damia, and while she rejoiced to reflect that she had not fallen into the net, and had seen through the plot, her wrath against the wicked old woman and Gorgo—whom she could not help including—burnt within her. Meanwhile she looked about her, expecting to see Marcus, or perhaps the young officer. Finding it impossible to think any evil of the young Christian, and having already trusted him so far, her fancy dwelt on him with particular pleasure; but she was curious, too, about the prefect, the early love of the proud merchant's daughter.

Time went on; the sun was high in the heavens, she was tired of staring, wondering and thinking, and, yawning wearily, she began to consider whether she would make herself

comfortable for a nap, or go down stairs and fill up the time by dressing herself up in her new garments. However, before she could do either, the slave returned from her errand to the house, and a few moments after she espied the young officer crossing the ship-yard towards the lake; she sat up, set the crescent straight that she wore in her hair, and waved her fan in a graceful greeting.

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The cavalry prefect, who knew that, of old, the barge was often used by Porphyrius' guests, though he did not happen to have heard who were its present occupants—bowed, with military politeness and precision, to the pretty girl lounging on the deck. Dada returned the greeting; but this seemed likely to be the end of their acquaintance, for the soldier walked on without turning round. He looked handsomer even than he had seemed the day before; his hair was freshly oiled and curled, his scale-armor gleamed as brightly, and his crimson tunic was as new and rich as if he were going at once to guard the Imperial throne. The merchant's daughter had good taste, but her friend looked no less haughty than herself. Dada longed to make his acquaintance and find out whether he really had no eyes for any one but Gorgo. To discover that it was not so, little as she cared about him personally, would have given her infinite satisfaction, and she decided that she must put him to the test. But there was no time to lose, so, as it would hardly do to call after him, she obeyed a sudden impulse, flung overboard the handsome fan which had been in her possession but one day, and gave a little cry in which alarm and regret were most skilfully and naturally expressed.

This had the wished-for effect. The officer turned round, his eyes met hers, and Dada leaned far over the boat's side pointing to the water and exclaiming:

"It is in the water—it has fallen into the lake!—my fan!"

The officer again bowed slightly; then he walked from the path down to the water's edge, while Dada went on more quietly:

"There, close there! Oh, if only you would! ...

"I am so fond of the fan, it is so pretty. Do you see, it is quite obliging? it is floating towards you!" Constantine had soon secured the fan, and shook it to dry it as he went across the plank to the vessel. Dada joyfully received it, stroked the feathers smooth, and warmly thanked its preserver, while he assured her that he only wished he could have rendered her some greater service. He was then about to retire with a bow no less distant than before, but he found himself unexpectedly detained by the Egyptian slave who, placing herself in his way, kissed the hem of his tunic and exclaimed:

"What joy for my lord your father and the lady your mother, and for poor Sachepris! My lord Constantine at home again!"

"Yes, at home at last," said the soldier in a deep pleasant voice. "Your old mistress is still hale and hearty? That is well. I am on my way to the others."

"They know that you have come," replied the slave. "Glad, they are all glad. They asked if my lord Constantine forgot old friends."

"Never, not one!"

“How long now since my lord Constantine went away—two, three years, and just the same. Only a cut over the eyes—may the hand wither that gave the blow!”

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Dada had already observed a broad scar which marked the soldier's brow as high up as she could see it for the helmet, and she broke in:

"How can you men like to slash and kill each other? Just think, if that cut had been only a finger's breadth lower—you would have lost your eyes, and oh! it is better to be dead than blind. When all the world is bright not to be able to see it; what must that be! The whole earth in darkness so that you see nothing—no one; neither the sky, nor the lake, nor the boat, nor even me."

"That would indeed be a pity," said the prefect with a laugh and a shrug.

"A pity!" exclaimed Dada. "As if it were nothing at all! I should find something else to say than that. It gives me a shudder only to think of being blind. How dreadfully dull life can be with one's eyes open! so what must it be when they are of no use and one cannot even look about one. Do you know that you have done me not one service only, but two at once?"

"I?" said the officer.

"Yes, you. But the second is not yet complete. Sit down awhile, I beg— there is a seat. You know it is a fatal omen if a visitor does not sit down before he leaves.—That is well. —And now, may I ask you: do you take off your helmet when you go into battle? No. —Then how could a swordcut hurt your forehead?"

"In a hand to hand scuffle," said the young man, "everything gets out of place. One man knocked my helmet off and another gave me this cut in my face."

"Where did it happen?"

"On the Savus, where we defeated Maximus."

"And had you this same helmet on?"

"Certainly."

"Oh! pray let me look at it! I can still see the dent in the metal; how heavy such a thing must be to wear!"

Constantine took off his helmet with resigned politeness and put it into her hands. She weighed it, thought it fearfully heavy, and then lifted it up to put it on her own fair curls; but this did not seem to please her new acquaintance, and saying rather shortly: "Allow me—" he took it from her, set it on his head and rose.

But Dada pointed eagerly to the seat.

"No, no," she said, "I have not yet had enough of your second kindness. I was on the point of death from sheer tedium; then you came, just in time; and if you want to carry out your work of mercy you must tell me something about the battle where you were wounded, and who took care of you afterwards, and whether the women of Pannonia are really as handsome as they are said to be. . ."

"I am sorry to say that I have not time," interrupted the officer. "Sachepris here is far better qualified to amuse you than I; some years since, at any rate, she lead a wonderful store of tales. I wish you a pleasant day!"

And with this farewell greeting, Constantine left the vessel, nor did he once look back at it or its pretty inhabitant as he made his way towards the house of Porphyrius.

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Dada as she gazed after him colored with vexation; again she had done a thing that Herse and—which she regretted still more—that Agne would certainly disapprove of. The stranger whom she had tried to draw into a flirtation was a really chivalrous man. Gorgo might be proud of such a lover; and if now, he were to go to her and tell her, probably with some annoyance, how provokingly he had been delayed by that pert little singing-girl, it would be all her own fault. She felt as though there were something in her which forced her to seem much worse than she really was, and wished to be. Agne, Marcus, the young soldier—nay, even Gorgo, were loftier and nobler than she or her people, and she was conscious for the first time that the dangers from which Marcus had longed to protect her were not the offspring of his fancy. She could not have found a name for them, but she understood that she was whirled and tossed through life from one thing to another, like a leaf before the wind, bereft of every stay or holdfast, defenceless even against the foolish vagaries of her own nature. Everyone, thought the girl to herself, distrusted and suspected her, and, solely because she was one of a family of singers, dared to insult and dishonor her. A strange spite against Fate, against her uncle and aunt, against herself even, surged up in her, and with it a vague longing for another and a better life.

Thus meditating she looked down into the water, not noticing what was going on around her, till the slave-woman, addressing her by name, pointed to a carriage drawn up at the side of the road that divided the grove of the Temple of Isis from the ship-yard, and which the Egyptian believed that she recognized as belonging to Marcus. Dada started up and ran off to the cabin to fetch her shoes, but everything in the shape of a sandal had vanished, and Herse had been wise when she had looked at those of the Egyptian, for Dada did the same and would not have hesitated to borrow them if they had been a little less dirty and clumsy.

Herse, no doubt, had played her this trick, and it was easy to guess why! It was only to divert her suspicions that the false woman had been so affectionate at parting. It was cheating, treachery-cruel and shameful! She, who had always submitted like a lamb—but this was too much—this she could not bear—this!... The slave-woman now followed her to desire her to come up on deck; a new visitor had appeared on the scene, an old acquaintance and fellow-voyager: Demetrius, Marcus' elder brother.

At any other time she would have made him gladly welcome, as a companion and comfort in her solitude; but he had chosen an evil hour for his visit and his proposals, as the girl's red cheeks and tearful eyes at once told him.

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He had come to fetch her, cost him what it might, and to carry her away to his country-home, near Arsinoe on the coast. It was not that he had any mad desire to make her his own, but that he thought it his most urgent duty to preserve his inexperienced brother from the danger into which his foolish passion for the little singing-girl was certain to plunge him. A purse full of gold, and a necklace of turquoise and diamonds, which he had purchased from a jeweller in the Jews' quarter for a sum for which he had often sold a ship-load of corn or a whole cellar full of wine or oil, were to supplement his proposals; and he went straight to the point, asking the girl simply and plainly to leave her friends and accompany him to Arsinoe. When she asked him, in much astonishment, "What to do there?" he told her he wanted a cheerful companion; he had taken a fancy to her saucy little nose, and though he could not flatter himself that he had ever found favor in her eyes he had brought something with him which she would certainly like, and which might help him to win her kindness. He was not niggardly, and if this—and this—and he displayed the sparkling necklace and laid the purse on her pillow—could please her she might regard them as an earnest of more, as much more as she chose, for his pockets were deep.

Dada did not interrupt him, for the growing indignation with which she heard him took away her breath. This fresh humiliation was beyond the bounds of endurance; and when at last she recovered her powers of speech and action, she flung the purse off the divan, and as it fell clattering on the floor, she kicked it away as far as possible, as though it were plague-tainted. Then, standing upright in front of her suitor, she exclaimed:

"Shame upon you all! You thought that because I am a poor girl, a singing-girl, and because you have filthy gold... Your brother Marcus would never have done such a thing, I am very sure!... And you, a horrid peasant! . . . If you ever dare set foot on this vessel again, Karnis and Orpheus shall drive you away as if you were a thief or an assassin! Eternal Gods! what is it that I have done, that everyone thinks I must be wicked? Eternal Gods . . ."

And she burst into loud spasmodic sobs and vanished down the steps that led below.

Demetrius called after her in soothing words and tones, but she would not listen. Then he sent down the slave to beg Dada to grant him a hearing, but the only answer he received was an order to quit the barge at once.

He obeyed, and as he picked up the purse he thought to himself:

"I may buy ship and vineyard back again; but I would send four more after those if I could undo this luckless deed. If I were a better and a worthier man, I might not so easily give others credit for being evil and unworthy."

CHAPTER IX.

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The town of Alexandria was stirred to its very foundations. From dawn till night every centre of public traffic and intercourse was the scene of hostile meetings between Christians and heathen, with frequent frays and bloodshed, only stopped by the intervention of the soldiery. Still, as we see that the trivial round of daily tasks is necessarily fulfilled, even when the hand of Fate lies heaviest on a household, and that children cannot forego their play even when their father is stretched on his death-bed, so the minor interests of individual lives pursued their course, even in the midst of the general agitation and peril.

The current of trade and of public business was, of course, checked at many points, but they never came to a stand-still. The physician visited the sick, the convalescent made his first attempt, leaning on a friendly arm, to walk from his bedroom to the “viridarium,” and alms were given and received. Hatred was abroad and rampant, but love held its own, strengthening old ties and forming new ones. Terror and grief weighed on thousands of hearts, while some tried to make a profit out of the prevailing anxiety, and others—many others—went forth, as light-hearted as ever, in pursuit of pleasure and amusement.

Horses were ridden and driven in the Hippodrome, and feasts were held in the pleasure-houses of Canopus, with music and noisy mirth; in the public gardens round the Paneum cock-fighting and quail-fighting were as popular as ever, and eager was the betting in new gold or humble copper. Thus may we see a child, safe on the roof of its father’s house, floating its toy boat on the flood that has drowned them all out; thus might a boy fly his gaudy kite in the face of a gathering storm; thus does the miser, on whom death has already laid its bony hand, count his hoarded coin; thus thoughtless youth dances over the heaving soil at the very foot of a volcano. What do these care for the common weal? Each has his separate life and personal interests. What he himself needs or desires—the greatest or the least—is to him more important and more absorbing than the requirements of the vast organism in which he is no more than a drop of blood or the hair of an eyelash.

Olympius was still in concealment in the house of Porphyrius—Olympius, whose mind and will had formerly had such imperious hold on the fate of the city, and to whose nod above half of the inhabitants were still obedient. Porphyrius and his family shared his views and regarded themselves as his confederates; but, even among them, the minor details of life claimed their place, and Gorgo, who entered into the struggle for the triumph of the old gods, gave but a half-hearted attention to the great cause to which she was enthusiastically devoted, because a companion of her childhood, to whose attentions she had every claim, delayed his visit longer than was kind.

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She had performed her 'Isis' lament the day before with all her heart and soul, and had urgently claimed Agne's assistance; but to-day, though she had been singing again and well, she had stopped to listen whenever she heard a door open in the adjoining room or voices in the garden, and had sung altogether with so much less feeling and energy than before that Karnis longed to reprove her sharply enough. This, however, would have been too indiscreet, so he could only express his annoyance by saying to his son, in a loud whisper:

"The most remarkable gifts, you see, and the highest abilities are of no avail so long as Art and Life are not one and the same—so long as Art is not the Alpha and Omega of existence, but merely an amusement or a decoration."

Agne had been true to herself, and had modestly but steadfastly declared that she could not possibly enter the temple of Isis, and her refusal had been accepted quite calmly, and without any argument or controversy. She had not been able to refuse Gorgo's request that she would repeat to-day the rehearsal she had gone through yesterday, since, to all appearance, her cooperation at the festival had been altogether given up. How could the girl guess that the venerable philosopher, who had listened with breathless admiration to their joint performance, had taken upon himself to dissipate her doubts and persuade her into compliance?

Olympius laid the greatest stress on Agne's assistance, for every one who clung to the worship of the old gods was to assemble in the sanctuary of Isis; and the more brilliant and splendid the ceremony could be made the more would that enthusiasm be fired which, only too soon, would be put to crucial proof. On quitting the temple the crowd of worshippers, all in holiday garb, were to pass in front of the Prefect's residence, and if only they could effect this great march through the city in the right frame of mind, it might confidently be expected that every one who was not avowedly Jew or Christian, would join the procession. It would thus become a demonstration of overwhelming magnitude and Cynegius, the Emperor's representative, could not fail to see what the feeling was of the majority of the towns folk, and what it was to drive matters to extremes and lay hands on the chief temples of such a city.

To Olympius the orator, grown grey in the exercise of logic and eloquence, it seemed but a small matter to confute the foolish doubts of a wilful girl. He would sweep her arguments to the winds as the storm drives the clouds before it; and any one who had seen the two together—the fine old man with the face and front of Zeus, with his thoughtful brow and broad chest, who could pour forth a flood of eloquence fascinatingly persuasive or convincingly powerful, and the modest, timid girl—could not have doubted on which side the victory must be.

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To-day, for the first time, Olympius had found leisure for a prolonged interview with his old friend Karnis, and while the girls were in the garden, amusing little Papias by showing him the swans and tame gazelles, the philosopher had made enquiries as to the Christian girl's history and then had heard a full account of the old musician's past life. Karnis felt it as a great favor that his old friend, famous now for his learning—the leader of his fellow-thinkers in the second city of the world, the high-priest of Serapis, to whose superior intellect he himself had bowed even in their student days—should remember his insignificant person and allow him to give him the history of the vicissitudes which had reduced him—the learned son of a wealthy house—to the position of a wandering singer.

Olympius had been his friend at the time when Karnis, on leaving college, instead of devoting himself to business and accounts, as his father wished, had thrown himself into the study of music, and at once distinguished himself as a singer, lute-player and leader of heathen choirs. Karnis was in Alexandria when the news reached him of his father's death. Before quitting the city he married Herse, who was beneath him alike in birth and in fortune, and who accompanied him on his return to Tauromenium in Sicily, where he found himself the possessor of an inheritance of which the extent and importance greatly astonished him.

At Alexandria he had been far better acquainted with the theatre than with the Museum or the school of the Serapeum; nay, as an amateur, he had often sung in the chorus there and acted as deputy for the regular leader. The theatre in his native town of Tauromenium had also been a famous one of old, but, at the time of his return, it had sunk to a very low ebb. Most of the inhabitants of the beautiful city nestling at the foot off Etna, had been converted to Christianity; among them the wealthy citizens at whose cost the plays had been performed and the chorus maintained. Small entertainments were still frequently given, but the singers and actors had fallen off, and in that fine and spacious theatre nothing was ever done at all worthy of its past glories. This Karnis deeply regretted, and with his wonted energy and vigor he soon managed to win the interest of those of his fellow-citizens who remained faithful to the old gods and had still some feeling for the music and poetry of the ancient Greeks, in his plans for their revival.

His purpose was to make the theatre the centre of a reaction against the influence of the Christians, by vieing with the Church in its efforts to win back the renegade heathen and confirming the faithful in their adhesion. The Greeks of Tauromenium should be reminded from the stage-boards of the might of the old gods and the glories of their past. To this end it was needful to restore the ruined theatre, and Karnis, after advancing the greater part of the money required, was entrusted with the management. He devoted himself zealously to the task, and soon was so successful that the plays at Tauromenium, and the musical performances in its Odeum, attracted the citizens in crowds, and were talked of far and wide. Such success was of course only purchased

at a heavy cost, and in spite of Herse's warnings, Karnis would never hesitate when the object in view was the preservation or advancement of his great work.

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Thus passed twenty years; then there came a day when his fine fortune was exhausted, and a time when the Christian congregation strained every nerve to deal a death-blow to the abomination of desolation in their midst. Again and again, and with increasing frequency, there were sanguinary riots between the Christians who forced their way into the theatre and the heathen audience, till at last a decree of the Emperor Theodosius prohibited the performance of heathen plays or music.

Now, the theatre at Tauromenium, for which Karnis had either given or advanced his whole inheritance, had ceased to exist, and the usurers who, when his own fortune was spent, had lent him moneys on the security of the theatre itself—while it still flourished—or on his personal security, seized his house and lands and would have cast him into the debtor's prison if he had not escaped that last disgrace by flight. Some good friends had rescued his family and helped them to follow him, and when they rejoined him he had begun his wanderings as a singer. Many a time had life proved miserable enough; still, he had always remained true to his art and to the gods of Olympus.

Olympius had listened to his narrative with many tokens of sympathy and agreement, and when Karnis, with tears in his eyes, brought his story to a close, the philosopher laid his hand on his friend's shoulder and drawing him towards him, exclaimed:

"Well done, my brave old comrade! We will both be faithful to the same good cause! You have made sacrifices for it as I have; and we need not despair yet. If we triumph here our friends in a thousand towns will begin to look up. The reading of the stars last night, and the auguries drawn from this morning's victims, portend great changes. What is down to the ground to-day may float high in the air to-morrow. All the signs indicate: 'A fall to the Greatest;' and what can be greater than Rome, the old tyrant queen of the nations? The immediate future, it is true, can hardly bring the final crash, but it is fraught with important consequences to us. I dreamed of the fall of the Caesars, and of a great Greek Empire risen from the ruins, powerful and brilliant under the special protection of the gods of Olympus; and each one of us must labor to bring about the realization of this dream. You have set a noble example of devotion and self-sacrifice, and I thank you in the name of all those who feel with us—nay, in the name of the gods themselves whom I serve! The first thing to be done now is to avert the blow which the Bishop intends shall strike us by the hand of Cynegius—it has already fallen on the magnificent sanctuary of the Apamaean Zeus. If the ambassador retires without having gained his purpose the balance will be greatly—enormously, in our favor, and it will cease to be a folly to believe in the success of our cause."

"Ah! teach us to hope once more," cried the musician. "That in itself is half the victory; still, I cannot see how this delay. . ."

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"It would give us time, and that is what we want," replied Olympius. "Everything is in preparation, but nothing is ready. Alexandria, Athens, Antioch, and Neapolis are to be the centres of the outbreak. The great Libanius is not a man of action, and even he approves of our scheme. No less a man than Florentin has undertaken to recruit for our cause among the heathen officers in the army. Messala, and the great Gothic captains Fraiut and Generid are ready to fight for the old gods. Our army will not lack leaders. . ."

"Our army!" exclaimed Karnis in surprise. "Is the matter so far advanced?"

"I mean the army of the future," cried Olympius enthusiastically. "It does not count a man as yet, but is already distributed into several legions. The vigor of mind and body—our learned youth on one hand and strong-armed peasantry on the other—form the nucleus of our force. Maximus could collect, in the utmost haste, the army which deprived Gratian of his throne and life, and was within a Hair-breadth of overthrowing Theodosius; and what was he but an ambitious rebel, and what tempted his followers but their hopes of a share in the booty? But we—we enlist them in the name of the loftiest ideas and warmest desires of the human heart, and, as the prize of victory, we show them the ancient faith with freedom of thought—the ancient loveliness of life. The beings whom the Christians can win over—a patch-work medley of loathsome Barbarians—let them wear out their lives as they choose! We are Greeks—the thinking brain, the subtle and sentient soul of the world. The polity, the empire, that we shall found on the overthrow of Theodosius and of Rome shall be Hellenic, purely Hellenic. The old national spirit, which made the Greeks omnipotent against the millions of Darius and Xerxes, shall live again, and we will keep the Barbarians at a distance as a Patrician forbids his inferiors to count themselves as belonging to his illustrious house. The Greek gods, Greek heroism, Greek art and Greek learning, under our rule shall rise from the dust—all the more promptly for the stringent oppression under which their indomitable spirit has so long languished."

"You speak to my heart!" cried Karnis. "My old blood flows more swiftly already, and if I only had a thousand talents left to give. . ."

"You would stake them on the future Greek Empire," said Olympius eagerly. "And we have adherents without number who feel as you do, my trusty friend. We shall succeed—as the great Julian would have succeeded but for the assassins who laid him low at so early an age; for Rome. . ."

"Rome is still powerful."

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“Rome is a colossus built up of a thousand blocks; but among them a hundred and more be but loosely in their places, and are ready to drop away from the body of the foul monster—sooner rather than later. Our shout alone will shake them down, and they will fall on our side, we may choose the best for our own use. Ere long—a few months only—the hosts will gather in the champaign country at the foot of Vesuvius, by land and by sea; Rome will open its gates wide to us who bring her back her old gods; the Senate will proclaim the emperor deposed and the Republic restored. Theodosius will come out against us. But the Idea for which we go forth to fight will hover before us, will stir the hearts of those soldiers and officers who would gladly—ah! how gladly—sacrifice to the Olympian gods and who only kiss the wounds of the crucified Jew under compulsion. They will desert from the labarum, which Constantine carried to victory, to our standards; and those standards are all there, ready for use; they have been made in this city and are lying hidden in the house of Apollodorus. Heaven-sent daemons showed them in a vision to my disciple Ammonius, when he was full of the divinity and lost in ecstasy, and I have had them made from his instructions.”

“And what do they represent?”

“The bust of Serapis with the ‘modius’ on his head. It is framed in a circle with the signs of the zodiac and the images of the great Olympian deities. We have given our god the head of Zeus, and the corn-measure on his head is emblematic of the blessing that the husbandman hopes for. The zodiac promises us a good star, and the figures representing it are not the common emblems, but each deeply significant. The Twins, for instance, are the mariner’s divinities, Castor and Pollux; Hercules stands by the Lion whom he has subdued; and the Fishes are dolphins, which love music. In the Scales, one holds the cross high in the air while the other is weighed down by Apollo’s laurel-wreath and the bolts of Zeus; in short, our standard displays everything that is most dear to the soul of a Greek or that fills him with devotion. Above all, Nike hovers with the crown of victory. If only fitting leaders are to be found at the centres of the movement, these standards will at once be sent out, and with them arms for the country-folk. A place of meeting has already been selected in each province, the password will be given, and a day fixed for a general rising.”

“And they will flock round you!” interrupted Karnis, “and—I, my son, will not be absent. Oh glorious, happy, and triumphant day! Gladly will I die if only I may first live to see the smoking offerings sending up their fragrance to the gods before the open doors of every temple in Greece; see the young men and maidens dancing in rapt enthusiasm to the sound of lutes and pipes, and joining their voices in the chorus! Then light will shine once more on the world, then life will once more mean joy, and death a departure from a scene of bliss.”

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"Aye, and thus shall it be!" cried Olympius, fired by this eager exposition of his own excitement, and he wrung the musician's hand. "We will restore life to the Greeks and teach them to scorn death as of yore. Let the Christians, the Barbarians, make life miserable and seek joy in death, if they list! But the girls have ceased singing. There is still much to be done to-day, and first of all I must confute the objections of your recalcitrant pupil."

"You will not find it an easy task," said Karnis. "Reason is a feeble weapon in contending with a woman."

"Not always," replied the philosopher. "But you must know how to use it. Leave me to deal with the child. There are really no singing-women left here; we have tried three, but they were all vulgar and ill taught. This girl, when she sings with Gorgo, has a voice that will go to the heart of the audience. What we want is to fire the crowd with enthusiasm, and she will help us to do it."

"Well, well. But you, Olympius, you who are the very soul of the revulsion we hope for, you must not be present at the festival. Indeed, sheltered as you are under Porphyrius' roof, there is a price on your head, and this house swarms with slaves, who all know you; if one of them, tempted by filthy lucre . . ."

"They will not betray me," smiled the philosopher. "They know that their aged mistress, Damia, and I myself command the daemons of the upper and lower spheres, and that at a sign from her or from me they would instantly perish; and even if there were an Ephialtes among them, a spring through that loop-hole would save me. Be easy, my friend. Oracles and stars alike foretell me death from another cause than the treason of a slave."

CHAPTER X.

Olympius followed Agne into the garden where he found her sitting by the marble margin of a small pool, giving her little brother pieces of bread to feed the swans with. He greeted her kindly and, taking up the child, showed him a ball which rose and fell on the jet of water from the fountain. Papias was not at all frightened by the big man with his white beard, for a bright and kindly gleam shone in his eyes, and his voice was soft and attractive as he asked him whether he had such another ball and could toss it as cleverly as the fountain did.

Papias said: "No," and Olympius, turning to Agne, went on:

"You should get him a ball. There is no better plaything, for play ought to consist in pleasant exertion which is in itself its object and gain. Play is the toil of a little child; and a ball, which he can throw and run after or catch, trains his eye, gives exercise to his



limbs and includes a double moral which men of every age and position should act upon: To look down on the earth and keep his gaze on the heavens.”

Agne nodded agreement and thanks, while Olympius set the child down and bid him run away to the paddock where some tame gazelles were kept. Then, going straight to the point, he said:

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"I hear you have declined to sing in the temple of Isis; you have been taught to regard the goddess to whom many good men turn in faith and confidence, as a monster of iniquity, but, tell me, do you know what she embodies?"

"No," replied Agne looking down; but she hastily rose from her seat and added with some spirit: "And I do not want to know, for I am a Christian and your gods are not mine."

"Well, well; your beliefs, of course, differ from ours in many points: still, I fancy that you and I have much in common. We belong to those who have learnt to 'look upwards'—there goes the ball, up again!—and who find comfort in doing so. Do you know that many men believe that the universe was formed by concurrence of mechanical processes and is still slowly developing, that there is no divinity whose love and power guard, guide and lend grace to the lives of men?"

"Oh! yes, I have been obliged to hear many such blasphemous things in Rome!"

"And they ran off you like water off the silvery sheen of that swan's plumage as he dips and raises his neck. Those who deny a God are, in your estimation, foolish or perhaps abominable?"

"I pity them, with all my heart."

"And with very good reason. You are an orphan and what its parents are to a child the divinity is to every member of the human race. In this Gorgo, and I, and many others whom you call heathen, feel exactly as you do; but you—have you ever asked yourself why and how it is that you, to whom life has been so bitter, have such a perfect conviction that there is a benevolent divinity who rules the world and your own fate to kindly ends? Why, in short, do you believe in a God?"

"I?" said Ague, looking puzzled, but straight into his face. "How could anything exist without God? You ask such strange questions. All I can see was created by our Father in Heaven."

"But there are men born blind who nevertheless believe in Him."

"They feel Him just as I see Him."

"Nay you should say: 'As I believe that I see and feel Him.' But I, for my part, think that the intellect has a right to test what the soul only divines, and that it must be a real happiness to see this divination proved by well-founded arguments, and thus transformed to certainty. Did you ever hear of Plato, the philosopher?"

"Yes, Karnis often speaks of him when he and Orpheus are discussing things which I do not understand."



“Well, Plato, by his intellect, worked out the proof of the problem which our feelings alone are so capable of apprehending rightly. Listen to me: If you stand on a spit of land at the entrance to a harbor and see a ship in the distance sailing towards you—a ship which carefully avoids the rocks, and makes straight for the shelter of the port—are you not justified in concluding that there is, on board that ship, a man who guides and steers it? Certainly. You not only

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may, but must infer that it is directed by a pilot. And if you look up at the sky and contemplate the well-ordered courses of the stars—when you see how everything on earth, great and small, obeys eternal laws and unerringly tends to certain preordained ends and issues, you may and must infer the existence of a ruling hand. Whose then but that of the Great Pilot of the universe—the Almighty Godhead.—Do you like my illustration?”

“Very much. But it only proves what I knew before.”

“Nevertheless, you must, I think, be pleased to find it so beautifully expressed.”

“Certainly.”

“And must admire the wise man who thought out the comparison. Yes?— Well, that man again was one of those whom you call heathen, who believed as we believe, and who at the same time worked out the evidence of the foundations of his faith for you as well as himself. And we, the later disciples of Plato—[Known as the school of the Neo-Platonists]—have gone even further than our master, and in many respects are much nearer to you Christians than you perhaps suspect. You see at once, of course, that we are no more inclined than you to conceive of the existence of the world and the destiny of man as independent of a God? However, I dare say you still think that your divinity and ours are as far asunder as the east from the west. But can you tell me where any difference lies?”

“I do not know,” said Ague uneasily. “I am only an ignorant girl; and who can learn the names even of all your gods?”

“Very true,” said Olympius. “There is great Serapis, whose temple you saw yesterday; there is Apollo, to whom Karnis prefers to offer sacrifice; there is Isis the bountiful, and her sister Nephthys, whose lament you and my young friend sing together so thrillingly; and besides these there are more immortals than I could name while Gorgo—who is leading your little brother to the lake out there—walked ten times from the shore to us and back; and yet—and yet my child, your God is ours and ours is yours.”

“No, no, He is not, indeed!” cried Agne with increasing alarm.

“But listen,” Olympius went on, with the same kind urgency but with extreme dignity, “and answer my questions simply and honestly. We are agreed, are we not?—that we perceive the divinity in the works of his creation, and even in his workings in our own souls. Then which are the phenomena of nature in which you discern Him as especially near to you? You are silent. I see, you have outlived your school-days and do not choose to answer to an uninvited catechism. And yet the things I wish you to name are

lovely in themselves and dear to your heart; and if only you did not keep your soft lips so firmly closed, but would give me the answer I ask for, you would remember much that is grand and beautiful. You would speak of the pale light of dawn, the tender flush that tinges the clouds as the glowing day-star rises from the waves,

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of the splendor of the sun—as glorious as truth and as warm as divine love. You would say: In the myriad blossoms that open to the morning, in the dew that bathes them and covers them with diamonds, in the ripening ears in the field, in the swelling fruit on the trees—in all these I see the mercy and wisdom of the divinity. I feel his infinite greatness as I gaze on the wide expanse of deep blue sea; it comes home to me at night when I lift my eyes to the skies and see the sparkling hosts of stars roll over my head. Who created that countless multitude, who guides them so that they glide past in glorious harmony, and rise and set, accurately timed to minutes and seconds, silent but full of meaning, immeasurably distant and yet closely linked with the fate of individual men?—All this bears witness to the existence of a God, and as you contemplate it and admire it with thankful emotion, you feel yourself drawn near to the Omnipotent. Aye, and even if you were deaf and blind, and lay bound and fettered in the gloom of a closely-shut cavern, you still could feel if love and pity and hope touched your heart. Rejoice then, child! for the immortals have endowed you with good gifts, and granted you sound senses by which to enjoy the beauty of creation. You exercise an art which binds you to the divinity like a bridge; when you give utterance to your whole soul in song that divinity itself speaks through you, and when you hear noble music its voice appeals to your ear. All round you and within you, you can recognize its power just as we feel it—everywhere and at all times.

“And this incomprehensible, infinite, unfettered, bountiful and infallibly wise Power, which penetrates and permeates the life of the universe as it does the hearts of men, though called by different names in different lands, is the same to every race, wherever it may dwell, whatever its language or its beliefs. You Christians call him the Heavenly Father, we give him the name of the Primal One. To you, too, your God speaks in the surging seas, the waving corn, the pure light of day; you, too, regard music which enchants your heart, and love which draws man to man, as his gifts; and we go only a step further, giving a special name to each phenomenon of nature, and each lofty emotion of the soul in which we recognize the direct influence of the Most High; calling the sea Poseidon, the corn-field Demeter, the charm of music Apollo, and the rapture of love Eros. When you see us offering sacrifice at the foot of a marble image you must not suppose that the lifeless, perishable stone is the object of our adoration. The god does not descend to inform the statue; but the statue is made after the Idea figured forth by the divinity it is intended to represent; and through that Idea the image is as intimately connected with the Godhead, as, by the bond of Soul, everything else that is manifest to our senses is connected with the phenomena of the supersensuous World. But this is beyond you;

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it will be enough for you if I assure you that the statue of Demeter, with the sheaf in her arms, is only intended to remind us to be grateful to the Divinity for our daily bread—a hymn of praise to Apollo expresses our thanks to the Primal One for the wings of music and song, on which our soul is borne upwards till it feels the very presence of the Most High. These are names, mere names that divide us; but if you were called anything else than Agne—Ismene, for instance, or Eudoxia—would you be at all different from what you are?—There you see—no, stay where you are—you must listen while I tell you that Isis, the much—maligned Isis, is nothing and represents nothing but the kindly influences of the Divinity, on nature and on human life. What she embodies to us is the abstraction which you call the loving-kindness of the Father, revealed in his manifold gifts, wherever we turn our eyes. The image of Isis reminds us of the lavish bounties of the Creator, just as you are reminded by the cross, the fish, and the lamb, of your Redeemer. Isis is the earth from whose maternal bosom the creative God brings forth food and comfort for man and beast; she is the tender yearning which He implants in the hearts of the lover and the beloved one; she is the bond of affection which unites husband and wife, brother and sister, which is rapture to the mother with a child at her breast and makes her ready and able for any sacrifice for the darling she has brought into the world. She shines, a star in the midnight sky, giving comfort to the sorrowing heart; she, who has languished in grief, pours balm into the wounded souls of the desolate and bereaved, and gives health and refreshment to the suffering. When nature pines in winter cold or in summer drought and lacks power to revive, when the sun is darkened, when lies and evil instincts alienate the soul from its pure first cause, then Isis uplifts her complaint, calling on her husband, Osiris, to return, to take her once more in his arms and fill her with new powers, to show the benevolence of God once more to the earth and to us men. You have learnt that lament; and when you sing it at her festival, picture yourself as standing with the Mother of Sorrows—the mother of your crucified divinity, by his open grave, and cry to your God that he may let him rise from the dead.”

Olympius spoke the last words with excited enthusiasm as though he were certain of the young girl's consent; but the effect was not what he counted on; for Agne, who had listened to him, so far, with increasing agitation, setting herself against his arguments like a bird under the fascinating glare of the snake's eye, at this last address seemed suddenly to shake off the spell of his seductive eloquence as the leaves drop from the crown of a tree shaken by the blast; the ideas of her Saviour and of the hymn she was to sing were utterly irreconcilable in her mind; she remembered the struggle she had fought out during the night, and the determination with which she had come to the house this morning. All the insidious language she had just heard was forgotten, swept away like dust from a rocky path, and her voice was firmly repellent as she said:

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“Your Isis has nothing in common with the Mother of our God, and how can you dare to compare your Osiris with the Lord who redeemed the world from death?”

Olympius, startled at the decision of her tone, rose from his seat, but he went on, as though he had expected this refusal:

“I will tell you—I will show you. Osiris—we will take him as being an Egyptian god, instead of Serapis in whose mysterious attributes you would find much to commend itself even to a Christian soul—Osiris, like your Master, voluntarily passed through death—to redeem the world from death—in this resembling your Christ. He, the Risen One, gives new light, and life, and blossom, and verdure to all that is darkened, dead and withered. All that seems to have fallen a prey to death is, by him, restored to a more beautiful existence; he, who has risen again, can bring even the departed soul to a resurrection; and when during this life its high aims have kept it unspotted by the dust of the sensual life, and he, as the judge, sees that it has preserved itself worthy of its pure First Cause, he allows it to return to the eternal and supreme Spirit whence it originally proceeded.

“And do not you, too, strive after purification, to the end that your soul may find an everlasting home in the radiant realms? Again and again do we meet with the same ideas, only they bear different forms and names. Try to feel the true bearing of my words, and then you will gladly join in the pathetic appeal to the sublime god to return. How like he is to your Lord! Is he not, like your Christ, a Saviour, and risen from the dead? The Temple or the Church—both are the sanctuaries of the Deity. By the ivy-wreathed altar of the weeping goddess, at the foot of the tall cypresses which cast their mysterious shadows on the snowy whiteness of the marble steps on which lies the bier of the god, you will feel the sacred awe which falls upon every pure soul when it is conscious of the presence of the Deity—call Him what you will.

“Isis, whom you now know, and who is neither more nor less than a personification of divine mercy, will make you a return by restoring you to the freedom for which you pine. She will allow you to find a home in some Christian house through our intervention, in acknowledgment of the pious service you are rendering, not to her but to the faith in divine goodness. There you may live with your little brother, as free as heart can desire. To-morrow you will go with Gorgo to the temple of the goddess . . .”

But Agne broke in on his speech: “No, I will not go with her!”

Her cheeks were scarlet and her breath came short and fast with excitement as she went on:

“I will not, I must not, I cannot! Do what you will with me: sell me and my brother, put us to turn a mill—but I will not sing in the temple!”

Olympius knit his brows; his beard quivered and his lips parted in wrath, but he controlled himself and going close to the girl he laid his hand on her shoulder and said in a deep grave tone of fatherly admonition:

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“Reflect, child, pause; think over what I have been saying to you; remember, too, what you owe the little one you love, and to-morrow morning tell us that you have duly weighed your answer. Give me your hand, my daughter; believe me, Olympius is one of your sincerest well-wishers.”

He turned his back on her and was going in doors. In front of the house Porphyrius and Karnis were standing in eager colloquy. The news that Marcus' mother Mary had sent for Herse had reached the singer, and his vivid fancy painted his wife as surrounded by a thousand perils, threatened by the widow, and carried before the judges. The merchant advised him to wait and see what came of it, as did Damia and Gorgo who were attracted to the spot by the vehemence of the discussion; but Karnis would not be detained, and he and Orpheus hurried off to the rescue. Thus Agne was left alone in the garden with her little brother, and perceiving that no one paid any further attention to their proceedings, she fell on her knees, clasped the child closely to her and whispered:

“Pray with me, Papias; pray, pray that the Lord will protect us, and that we may not be turned out of the way that leads us to our parents! Pray, as I do!”

For a minute she remained prostrate with the child by her side. Then, rising quickly, she took him by the hand and led him in almost breathless haste through the garden-gate out into the road, bending her steps towards the lake and then down the first turning that led to the city.

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Perish all those who do not think as we do
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Words that sounded kindly, but with a cold, unloving heart

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