

BARING-GOULD SABINE

**PERPETUA. A TALE OF
NIMES IN A.D. 213**

Sabine Baring-Gould

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CHAPTER I

EST

The Kalends (first) of March.

A brilliant day in the town of Nemausus – the modern Nîmes – in the Province of Gallia Narbonensis, that arrogated to itself the title of being *the* province, a title that has continued in use to the present day, as distinguishing the olive-growing, rose-producing, ruin-strewn portion of Southern France, whose fringe is kissed by the blue Mediterranean.

Not a cloud in the nemophyla-blue sky. The sun streamed down, with a heat that was unabsorbed, and with rays unshorn by any intervenient vapor, as in our northern clime. Yet a cool air from the distant snowy Alps touched, as with the kiss of a vestal, every heated brow, and refreshed it.

The Alps, though invisible from Nemausus, make themselves felt, now in refreshing breezes, then as raging icy blasts.

The anemones were in bloom, and the roses were budding. Tulips spangled the vineyards, and under the olives and in the most arid soil, there appeared the grape hyacinth and the star of Bethlehem.

At the back of the white city stands a rock, the extreme limit of a spur of the Cebennæ, forming an amphitheatre, the stones scrambled over by blue and white periwinkle, and the crags heavy with syringa and flowering thorns.

In the midst of this circus of rock welled up a river of transparent bottle-green water, that filled a reservoir, in which circled white swans.

On account of the incessant agitation of the water, that rose in bells, and broke in rhythmic waves against the containing breastwork, neither were the swans mirrored in the surface, nor did the white temple of Nemausus reflect its peristyle of channeled pillars in the green flood.

This temple occupied one side of the basin; on the other, a little removed, were the baths, named after Augustus, to which some of the water was conducted, after it had passed beyond the precinct within which it was regarded as sacred.

It would be hard to find a more beautiful scene, or see such a gay gathering as that assembled near the Holy Fountain on this first day of March.

Hardly less white than the swans that dreamily swam in spirals, was the balustrade of limestone that surrounded the sheet of heaving water. At intervals on this breasting stood pedestals, each supporting a statue in Carrara marble. Here was Diana in buskins, holding a bow in her hand, in the attitude of running, her right hand turned to draw an arrow from the quiver at her back. There was the Gallic god Camulus, in harness, holding up a six-rayed wheel, all gilt, to signify the sun. There was a nymph pouring water from her urn; again appeared Diana contemplating her favorite flower, the white poppy.

But in the place of honor, in the midst of the public walk before the fountain, surrounded by acacias and pink-blossomed Judas trees, stood the god Nemausus, who was at once the presiding deity over the fountain, and the reputed founder of the city. He was represented as a youth, of graceful form, almost feminine, and though he bore some military insignia, yet seemed too girl-like and timid to appear in war.

The fountain had, in very truth, created the city. This marvelous upheaval of a limpid river out of the heart of the earth had early attracted settlers to it, who had built their rude cabins beside the stream and who paid to the fountain divine honors. Around it they set up a circle of rude stones,

and called the place *Nemet*— that is to say, the Sacred Place. After a while came Greek settlers, and they introduced a new civilization and new ideas. They at once erected an image of the deity of the fountain, and called this deity Nemausios. The spring had been female to the Gaulish occupants of the settlement; it now became male, but in its aspect the deity still bore indications of feminine origin. Lastly the place became a Roman town. Now beautiful statuary had taken the place of the monoliths of unhewn stone that had at one time bounded the sacred spring.

On this first day of March the inhabitants of Nemausus were congregated near the fountain, all in holiday costume.

Among them ran and laughed numerous young girls, all with wreaths of white hyacinths or of narcissus on their heads, and their clear musical voices rang as bells in the fresh air.

Yet, jocund as the scene was, to such as looked closer there was observable an under-current of alarm that found expression in the faces of the elder men and women of the throng, at least in those of such persons as had their daughters flower-crowned.

Many a parent held the child with convulsive clasp, and the eyes of fathers and mothers alike followed their darlings with a greed, as though desirous of not losing one glimpse, not missing one word, of the little creature on whom so many kisses were bestowed, and in whom so much love was centered.

For this day was specially dedicated to the founder and patron of the town, who supplied it with water from his unfailing urn, and once in every seven years on this day a human victim was offered in sacrifice to the god Nemausus, to ensure the continuance of his favor, by a constant efflux of water, pure, cool and salubrious.

The victim was chosen from among the daughters of the old Gaulish families of the town, and the victim was selected from among girls between the ages of seven and seventeen. Seven times seven were bound to appear on this day before the sacred spring, clothed in white and crowned with spring flowers. None knew which would be chosen and which rejected. The selection was not made by either the priests or the priestesses attached to the temple. Nor was it made by the magistrates of Nemausus. No parent might redeem his child. Chance or destiny alone determined who was to be chosen out of the forty-nine who appeared before the god.

Suddenly from the temple sounded a blast of horns, and immediately the peristyle (colonnade) filled with priests and priestesses in white, the former with wreaths of silvered olive leaves around their heads, the latter crowned with oak leaves of gold foil.

The trumpeters descended the steps. The crowd fell back, and a procession advanced. First came players on the double flute, or syrinx, with red bands round their hair. Then followed dancing girls performing graceful movements about the silver image of the god that was borne on the shoulders of four maidens covered with spangled veils of the finest oriental texture. On both sides paced priests with brazen trumpets.

Before and behind the image were boys bearing censers that diffused aromatic smoke, which rose and spread in all directions, wafted by the soft air that spun above the cold waters of the fountain.

Behind the image and the dancing girls marched the priests and priestesses, singing alternately a hymn to the god.

“Hail, holy fountain, limpid and eternal,
Green as the sapphire, infinite, abundant,
Sweet, unpolluted, cold and clear as crystal,
Father Nemausus.

Hail, thou Archegos, founder of the city,
Crowned with oak leaves, cherishing the olive,
Grapes with thy water annually flushing,

Father Nemausus.

Thou to the thirsty givest cool refreshment,
Thou to the herdsman yieldeth yearly increase,
Thou from the harvest wardest off diseases,
Father Nemausus.

Seven are the hills on which old Rome is founded,
Seven are the hills engirdling thy fountain,
Seven are the planets set in heaven ruling,
Father Nemausus.

Thou, the perennial, lovest tender virgins,
Do thou accept the sacrifice we offer;
May thy selection be the best and fittest,
Father Nemausus.”

Then the priests and priestesses drew up in lines between the people and the fountain, and the ædile of the city, standing forth, read out from a roll the names of seven times seven maidens; and as each name was called, a white-robed, flower-crowned child fluttered from among the crowd and was received by the priestly band.

When all forty-nine were gathered together, then they were formed into a ring, holding hands, and round this ring passed the bearers of the silver image.

Now again rose the hymn:

“Hail, holy fountain, limpid and eternal,
Green as the sapphire, infinite, abundant,
Sweet, unpolluted, cold and clear as crystal,
Father Nemausus.”

And as the bearers carried the image round the circle, suddenly a golden apple held by the god, fell and touched a graceful girl who stood in the ring.

“Come forth, Lucilla,” said the chief priestess. “It is the will of the god that thou speak the words. Begin.”

Then the damsel loosed her hands from those she held, stepped into the midst of the circle and raised the golden pippin. At once the entire ring of children began to revolve, like a dance of white butterflies in early spring; and as they swung from right to left, the girl began to recite at a rapid pace a jingle of words in a Gallic dialect, that ran thus:

“One and two
Drops of dew,
Three and four
Shut the door.”

As she spoke she indicated a child at each numeral,

“Five and six
Pick up sticks,
Seven and eight

Thou must wait.”

Now there passed a thrill through the crowd, and the children whirled quicker.

“Nine and ten
Pass again.
Golden pippin, lo! I cast,
Thou, Alcmene, touched at last.”

At the word “last” she threw the apple and struck a girl, and at once left the ring, cast her coronet of narcissus into the fountain and ran into the crowd. With a gasp of relief she was caught in the arms of her mother, who held her to her heart, and sobbed with joy that her child was spared. For her, the risk was past, as she would be over age when the next septennial sacrifice came round.

Now it was the turn of Alcmene.

She held the ball, paused a moment, looking about her, and then, as the troop of children revolved, she rattled the rhyme, and threw the pippin at a damsel named Tertiola. Whereupon she in turn cast her garland, that was of white violets, into the fountain, and withdrew.

Again the wreath of children circled and Tertiola repeated the jingle till she came to “Touched at last,” when a girl named Ælia was selected, and came into the middle. This was a child of seven, who was shy and clung to her mother. The mother fondled her, and said, “My Ælia! Rejoice that thou art not the fated victim. The god has surrendered thee to me. Be speedy with the verse, and I will give thee *crustulae* that are in my basket.”

So encouraged, the frightened child rattled out some lines, then halted; her memory had failed, and she had to be reminded of the rest. At last she also was free, ran to her mother’s bosom and was comforted with cakes.

A young man with folded arms stood lounging near the great basin. He occasionally addressed a shorter man, a client apparently, from his cringing manner and the set smile he wore when addressing or addressed by the other.

“By Hercules!” said the first. “Or let me rather swear by Venus and her wayward son, the Bow-bearer, that is a handsome girl yonder, she who is the tallest, and methinks the eldest of all. What is her name, my Callipodius?”

“She that looks so scared, O supremacy of excellent youths, Æmilius Lentulus Varo! I believe that she is the daughter and only child of the widow Quincta, who lost her husband two years ago, and has refused marriage since. They whisper strange things concerning her.”

“What things, thou tittle-tattle bearer?”

“Nay, I bear but what is desired of me. Didst thou not inquire of me who the maiden was? I have a mind to make no answer. But who can deny anything to thee?”

“By the genius of Augustus,” exclaimed the patron, “thou makest me turn away my head at thy unctuous flattery. The peasants do all their cooking in oil, and when their meals be set on the table the appetite is taken away, there is too much oil. It is so with thy conversation. Come, thy news.”

“I speak but what I feel. But see how the circle is shrunk. As to the scandal thou wouldst hear, it is this. The report goes that the widow and her daughter are infected with a foreign superstition, and worship an ass’s head.”

“An ass’s head hast thou to hold and repeat such lies. Look at the virgin. Didst ever see one more modest, one who more bears the stamp of sound reason and of virtue on her brow. The next thou wilt say is – ”

“That these Christians devour young children.”

“This is slander, not scandal. By Jupiter Camulus! the circle is reduced to four, and she, that fair maid, is still in it. There is Quinctilla, the daughter of Largus; look at him, how he eyes her with agony in his face! There is Vestilia Patercola. I would to the gods that the fair – what is her name?”

“Perpetua, daughter of Aulus Har – ”

“Ah!” interrupted the patron, uneasily. “Quinctilla is out.”

“Her father, Aulus Harpinus – ”

“See, see!” again burst in the youth Æmilius, “there are but two left; that little brown girl, and she whom thou namest – ”

“Perpetua.”

Now arrived the supreme moment – that of the final selection. The choosing girl, in whose hand was the apple, stood before those who alone remained. She began:

“One, two
Drops of dew.”

Although there was so vast a concourse present, not a sound could be heard, save the voice of the girl repeating the jingle, and the rush of the holy water over the weir. Every breath was held.

“Nine and ten,
Pass again.
Golden pippin, now I cast,
Thou, Portumna, touched at last.”

At once the brown girl skipped to the basin, cast in her garland, and the high priestess, raising her hand, stepped forward, pointed to Perpetua, and cried, “Est.”

CHAPTER II

ÆMILIUS

When the lot had fallen, then a cry rang from among the spectators, and a woman, wearing the white cloak of widowhood, would have fallen, had she not been caught and sustained by a man in a brown tunic and *lacerna* (short cloak).

“Be not overcome, lady,” said this man in a low tone. “What thou lovest is lent to the Lord.”

“Baudillas,” sobbed the woman, “she is my only child, and is to be sacrificed to devils.”

“The devil hath no part in her. She is the Lord’s, and the Lord will preserve His own.”

“Will He give her back to me? Will He deliver her from the hands of His enemies?”

“The Lord is mighty even to do this. But I say not that it will be done as thou desirest. Put thy trust in Him. Did Abraham withhold his son, his only son, when God demanded him?”

“But this is not God, it is Nemausus.”

“Nemausus is naught but a creature, a fountain, fed by God’s rains. It is the Lord’s doing that the lot has fallen thus. It is done to try thy faith, as of old the faith of Abraham was tried.”

The poor mother clasped her arms, and buried her head in them.

Then the girl thrust aside such as interposed and essayed to reach her mother. The priestesses laid hands on her, to stay her, but she said:

“Suffer me to kiss my mother, and to comfort her. Do not doubt that I will preserve a smiling countenance.”

“I cannot permit it,” said the high priestess. “There will be resistance and tears.”

“And therefore,” said the girl, “you put drops of oil or water into the ears of oxen brought to the altars, that they may nod their heads, and so seem to express consent. Let me console my mother, so shall I be able to go gladly to death. Otherwise I may weep, and thereby mar thy sacrifice.”

Then, with firmness, she thrust through the belt of priestesses, and clasped the almost fainting and despairing mother to her heart.

“Be of good courage,” she said. “Be like unto Felicitas, who sent her sons, one by one, to receive the crown, and who – blessed mother that she was – encouraged them in their torments to play the man for Christ.”

“But thou art my only child.”

“And she offered them all to God.”

“I am a widow, and alone.”

“And such was she.”

Then said the brown-habited man whom the lady had called Baudillas:

“Quincta, remember that she is taken from an evil world, in which are snares, and that God may have chosen to deliver her by this means from some great peril to her soul, against which thou wouldst have been powerless to protect her.”

“I cannot bear it,” gasped the heart-broken woman. “I have lived only for her. She is my all.”

Then Perpetua gently unclasped the arms of her mother, who was lapsing into unconsciousness, kissed her, and said:

“The God of all strength and comfort be to thee a strong tower of defence.” And hastily returned to the basin.

The young man who before had noticed Perpetua, turned with quivering lip to his companion, and said:

“I would forswear Nemausus – that he should exact such a price. Look at her face, Callipodius. Is it the sun that lightens it? By Hercules, I could swear that it streamed with effulgence from within – as though she were one of the gods.”

“The more beautiful and innocent she be, the more grateful is she to the august Archegos!”

“Pshaw!” scoffed the young man; his hand clutched the marble balustrade convulsively, and the blood suffused his brow and cheeks and throat. “I believe naught concerning these deities. My father was a shrewd man, and he ever said that the ignorant people created their own gods out of heroes, or the things of Nature, which they understood not, being beasts.”

“But tell me, Æmilius – and thou art a profundity of wisdom, unsounded as is this spring – what is this Nemausus?”

“The fountain.”

“And how comes the fountain to ever heave with water, and never to fail. Verily it lives. See – it is as a thing that hath life and movement. If not a deity, then what is it?”

“Nay – I cannot say. But it is subject to destiny.”

“In what way?”

“Ruled to flow.”

“But who imposed the rule?”

“Silence! I can think of naught save the innocent virgin thus sacrificed to besotted ignorance.”

“Thou canst not prevent it. Therefore look on, as at a show.”

“I cannot prevent it. I marvel at the magistrates – that they endure it. They would not do so were it to touch at all those of the upper town. Besides, did not the god Claudius – ”

“They are binding her.”

“She refuses to be bound.”

Shrieks now rang from the frantic mother, and she made desperate efforts to reach her daughter. She was deaf to the consolations of Baudillas, and to the remonstrances and entreaties of the people around her, who pitied and yet could not help her. Then said the ædile to his police, “Remove the woman!”

The chief priest made a sign, and at once the trumpeters began to bray through their brazen tubes, making such a noise as to drown the cries of the mother.

“I would to the gods I could save her,” said Æmilius between his teeth. He clenched his hands, and his eyes flashed. Then, without well knowing what he did, he unloosed his toga, at the same time that the priestesses divested Perpetua of her girded stole, and revealed her graceful young form in the tunic bordered with purple indicative of the nobility of the house to which she belonged.

The priest had bound her hands; but Perpetua smiled, and shook off the bonds at her feet. “Let be,” she said, “I shall not resist.”

On her head she still wore a crown of white narcissus. Not more fresh and pure were these flowers than her delicate face, which the blood had left. Ever and anon she turned her eyes in the direction of her mother, but she could no longer see her, as the attendants formed a ring so compact that none could break through.

“Elect of the god, bride of Nemausus!” said the chief priestess, “ascend the balustrade of the holy perennial fountain.”

Without shrinking, the girl obeyed.

She fixed her eyes steadily on the sky, and then made the sacred sign on her brow.

“What doest thou?” asked the priestess. “Some witchcraft I trow.”

“No witchcraft, indeed,” answered the girl. “I do but invoke the Father of Lights with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”

“Ah, Apollo! – he is not so great a god as our Nemausus.”

Then at a sign, the trumpeters blew a furious bellow and as suddenly ceased. Whereupon to the strains of flutes and the tinkling of triangles, the choir broke forth into the last verse of the hymn:

“Thou, the perennial, loving tender virgins,
Do thou accept the sacrifice we offer;

May thy selection be the best and fittest,
Father Nemausus.”

As they chanted, and a cloud of incense mounted around her, Perpetua looked down into the water. It was green as glacier ice, and so full of bubbles in places as to be there semi-opaque. The depth seemed infinite. No bottom was visible. No fish darted through it. An immense volume boiled up unceasingly from unknown, unfathomed depths. The wavelets lapped the marble breasting as though licking it with greed expecting their victim.

The water, after brimming the basin, flowed away over a sluice under a bridge as a considerable stream. Then it lost its sanctity and was employed for profane uses.

Perpetua heard the song of the ministers of the god, but gave no heed to it, for her lips moved in prayer, and her soul was already unfurling its pure wings to soar into that Presence before which, as she surely expected, she was about to appear.

When the chorus had reached the line:

“May thy selection be the best and fittest,
Father Nemausus!”

then she was thrust by three priestesses from the balustrade and precipitated into the basin. She uttered no cry, but from all present a gasp of breath was audible.

For a moment she disappeared in the vitreous waters, and her white garland alone remained floating on the surface.

Then her dress glimmered, next her arm, as the surging spring threw her up.

Suddenly from the entire concourse rose a cry of astonishment and dismay.

The young man, Æmilius Lentulus Varo, had leaped into the holy basin.

Why had he so leaped? Why?

CHAPTER III

BAUDILLAS, THE DEACON

The chain of priests and priestesses could not restrain the mob, that thrust forward to the great basin, to see the result.

Exclamations of every description rose from the throng.

“He fell in!”

“Nay, he cast himself in. The god will withdraw the holy waters. It was impious. The fountain is polluted.”

“Was it not defiled when a dead tom-cat was found in it? Yet the fountain ceased not to flow.”

“The maiden floats!”

“Why should the god pick out the handsomest girl? His blood is ice-cold. She is not a morsel for him,” scoffed a red-faced senator.

“He rises! He is swimming.”

“He has grappled the damsel.”

“He is striking out! Bene! Bene!”

“Encourage not the sacrilegious one! Thou makest thyself partaker in his impiety!”

“What will the magistrates do?”

“Do! Coil up like wood-lice, and uncurl only when all is forgotten.”

“He is a Christian.”

“His father was a philosopher. He swears by the gods.”

“He is an atheist.”

“See! See! He is sustaining her head.”

“She is not dead; she gasps.”

“Body of Bacchus! how the water boils. The god is wroth.”

“Bah! It boils no more now than it did yesterday.”

In the ice-green water could be seen the young man with nervous arms striking out. He held up the girl with one arm. The swell of the rising volumes of water greatly facilitated his efforts. Indeed the upsurging flood had such force, that to die by drowning in it was a death by inches, for as often as a body went beneath the surface, it was again propelled upwards.

In a minute he was at the breastwork, had one hand on it, then called: “Help, some one, to lift her out!”

Thereupon the man clothed in brown wool put down his arms, clasped the half-conscious girl and raised her from the water. Callipodius assisted, and between them she was lifted out of the basin. The priests and priestesses remonstrated with loud cries. But some of the spectators cheered. A considerable portion of the men ranged themselves beside the two who had the girl in their arms, and prevented the ministers of Nemausus from recovering Perpetua from the hands of her rescuers.

The men of the upper town – Greek colonists, or their descendants – looked superciliously and incredulously on the cult of the Gallic deity of the fountain. It was tolerated, but laughed at, as something that belonged to a class of citizens that was below them in standing.

In another moment Æmilius Lentulus had thrown himself upon the balustrade, and stood facing the crowd, dripping from every limb, but with a laughing countenance.

Seeing that the mob was swayed by differing currents of feeling and opinion, knowing the people with whom he had to do, he stooped, whispered something into the ear of Callipodius; then, folding his arms, he looked smilingly around at the tossing crowd, and no sooner did he see his opportunity than, unclasping his arms, he assumed the attitude of an orator, and cried:

“Men and brethren of the good city of Nemausus! I marvel at ye, that ye dare to set at naught the laws of imperial and eternal Rome. Are ye not aware that the god Claudius issued an edict with special application to Gaul, that forever forbade human sacrifices? Has that edict been withdrawn? I have myself seen and read it graven in brass on the steps of the Capitoline Hill at Rome. So long as that law stands unrepealed ye are transgressors.”

“The edict has fallen into desuetude, and desuetude abrogates a law!” called one man.

“Is it so? How many have suffered under Nero, under Caius, because they transgressed laws long forgotten? Let some one inform against the priesthood of Nemausus and carry the case to Rome.”

A stillness fell on the assembly. The priests looked at one another.

“But see!” continued Æmilius, “I call you to witness this day. The god himself rejects such illegal offerings. Did you not perceive how he spurned the virgin from him when ye did impiously cast her into his holy urn? Does he not sustain life with his waters, and not destroy it? Had he desired the sacrifice then would he have gulped it down, and you would have seen the maiden no more. Not so! He rejected her; with his watery arms he repelled her. Every crystal wave he cast up was a rejection. I saw it, and I leaped in to deliver the god from the mortal flesh that he refused. I appeal to you all again. To whom did the silver image cast the apple? Was it to the maiden destined to die? Nay, verily, it was to her who was to live. The golden pippin was a fruit of life, whereby he designated such as he willed to live. Therefore, I say that the god loveth life and not death. Friends and citizens of Nemausus, ye have transgressed the law, and ye have violated the will of the divine Archegos who founded our city and by whose largess of water we live.”

Then one in the crowd shouted: “There is a virgin cast yearly from the bridge over the Rhodanus at Avenio.”

“Aye! and much doth that advantage the bridge and the city. Did not the floods last November carry away an arch and inundate an entire quarter of the town? Was the divine river forgetful that he had received his obligation, or was he ungrateful for the favor? Naught that is godlike can be either.”

“He demanded another life.”

“Nay! He was indignant that the fools of Avenio should continue to treat him as though he were a wild beast that had to be glutted, and not as a god. All you parents that fear for your children! Some of you have already lost your daughters, and have trembled for them; combine, and with one voice proclaim that you will no more suffer this. Look to the urn of the divine Nemausus. See how evenly the ripples run. Dip your fingers in the water and feel how passionless it is. Has he blown forth a blast of seething water and steam like the hot springs of Aquæ Sextiæ? Has his fountain clouded with anger? Was the god powerless to avenge the act when I plunged in? If he had desired the death of the maiden would he have suffered me, a mortal, to pluck her from his gelid lips? Make room on Olympus, O ye gods, and prepare a throne for Common Sense, and let her have domain over the minds of men.”

“There is no such god,” called one in the crowd.

“Ye know her not, so besotted are ye.”

“He blasphemes, he mocks the holy and immortal ones.”

“It is ye who mock them when ye make of them as great clowns as yourselves. The true eternal gods laugh to hear me speak the truth. Look at the sun. Look at the water, with its many twinkling smiles. The gods approve.”

Whilst the young man thus harangued and amused the populace, Baudillas and Quincta, assisted by two female slaves of the latter, removed the drenched, dripping, and half-drowned girl. They bore her with the utmost dispatch out of the crowd down a sidewalk of the city gardens to a bench, on which they laid her, till she had sufficiently recovered to open her eyes and recognize those who surrounded her.

Then said the widow to one of the servants: “Run, Petronella, and bid the steward send porters with a litter. We must convey Perpetua as speedily as possible from hence, lest there be a riot, and the ministers of the devil stir up the people to insist upon again casting her into the water.”

“By your leave, lady,” said Baudillas, “I would advise that, at first, she should not be conveyed to your house, but to mine. It is probable, should that happen which you fear, that the populace may make a rush to your dwelling, in their attempt to get hold of the lady, your daughter. It were well that she remained for a while concealed in my house. Send for the porters to bring the litter later, when falls the night.”

“You are right,” said Quincta. “It shall be so.”

“As in the Acts of the Blessed Apostles it is related that the craftsmen who lived by making silver shrines for Diana stirred up the people of Ephesus, so may it be now. There are many who get their living by the old religion, many whose position and influence depend on its maintenance, and such will not lightly allow a slight to be cast on their superstitions like as has been offered this day. But by evenfall we shall know the humor of the people. Young lady, lean on my arm and let me conduct thee to my lodging. Thou canst there abide till it is safe for thee to depart.”

Then the brown-habited man took the maiden’s arm.

Baudillas was a deacon of the Church in Nemausus – a man somewhat advanced in life. His humility, and, perhaps, also his lack of scholarship, prevented his aspiring to a higher office; moreover, he was an admirable minister of the Church as deacon, at a period when the office was mainly one of keeping the registers of the sick and poor, and of distributing alms among such as were in need.

The deacon was the treasurer of the Church, and he was a man selected for his business habits and practical turn of mind. By his office he was more concerned with the material than the spiritual distresses of men. Nevertheless, he was of the utmost value to the bishops and presbyters, for he was their feeler, groping among the poorest, entering into the worst haunts of misery and vice, quick to detect tokens of desire for better things, and ready to make use of every opening for giving rudimentary instruction.

Those who occupied the higher grades in the Church, even at this early period, were, for the most part, selected from the cultured and noble classes; not that the Church had respect of persons, but because of the need there was of possessing men who could penetrate into the best houses, and who, being related to the governing classes, might influence the upper strata of society, as well as that which was below. The great houses with their families of slaves in the city, and of servile laborers on their estates, possessed vast influence for good or evil. A believing master could flood a whole population that depended on him with light, and was certain to treat his slaves with Christian humanity. On the other hand, it occasionally happened that it was through a poor slave that the truth reached the heart of a master or mistress.

Baudillas led the girl, now shivering with cold, from the garden, and speedily reached a narrow street. Here the houses on each side were lofty, unadorned, and had windows only in the upper stories, arched with brick and unglazed. In cold weather they were closed with shutters.

The pavement of the street was of cobble-stones and rough. No one was visible; no sound issued from the houses, save only from one whence came the rattle of a loom; and a dog chained at a door barked furiously as the little party went by.

“This is the house,” said Baudillas, and he struck against a door.

After some waiting a bar was withdrawn within, and the door, that consisted of two valves, was opened by an old, slightly lame slave.

“Pedo,” said the deacon, “has all been well?”

“All is well, master,” answered the man.

“Enter, ladies,” said Baudillas. “My house is humble and out of repair, but it was once notable. Enter and rest you awhile. I will bid Pedo search for a change of garments for Perpetua.”

“Hark,” exclaimed Quincta, “I hear a sound like the roar of the sea.”

“It is the voice of the people. It is a roar like that for blood, that goes up from the amphitheater.”

CHAPTER IV

THE UTRICULARES

The singular transformation that had taken place in the presiding deity of the fountain, from being a nymph into a male god, had not been sufficiently complete to alter the worship of the deity. As in the days of Druidism, the sacred source was under the charge of priestesses, and although, with the change of sex of the deity, priests had been appointed to the temple, yet they were few, and occupied a position of subordination to the chief priestess. She was a woman of sagacity and knowledge of human nature. She perceived immediately how critical was the situation. If Æmilius Lentulus were allowed to proceed with his speech he would draw to him the excitable Southern minds, and it was quite possible might provoke a tumult in which the temple would be wrecked. At the least, his words would serve to chill popular devotion.

The period when Christianity began to radiate through the Roman world was one when the traditional paganism with its associated rights, that had contented a simpler age, had lost its hold on the thoughtful and cultured. Those who were esteemed the leaders of society mocked at religion, and although they conformed to its ceremonial, did so with ill-disguised contempt. At their tables, before their slaves, they laughed at the sacred myths related of the gods, as absurd and indecent, and the slaves thought it became them to affect the same incredulity as their masters. Sober thinkers endeavored to save some form of religion by explaining away the monstrous legends, and attributing them to the wayward imagination of poets. The existence of the gods they admitted, but argued that the gods were the unintelligent and blind forces of nature; or that, if rational, they stood apart in cold exclusiveness and cared naught for mankind. Many threw themselves into a position of agnosticism. They professed to believe in nothing but what their senses assured them did exist, and asserted that as there was no evidence to warrant them in declaring that there were gods, they could not believe in them; that moreover, as there was no revelation of a moral law, there existed no distinction between right and wrong. Therefore, the only workable maxim on which to rule life was: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we may die."

Over all men hung the threatening cloud of death. All must undergo the waning of the vital powers, the failure of health, the withering of beauty, the loss of appetite for the pleasure of life, or if not the loss of appetite, at least the faculty for enjoyment.

There was no shaking off the oppressive burden, no escape from the gathering shadow. Yet, just as those on the edge of a precipice throw themselves over, through giddiness, so did men rush on self-destruction in startling numbers and with levity, because weary of life, and these were precisely such as had enjoyed wealth to the full and had run through the whole gamut of pleasures.

What happened after death? Was there any continuance of existence?

Men craved to know. They felt that life was too brief altogether for the satisfaction of the aspirations of their souls. They ran from one pleasure to another without filling the void within.

Consequently, having lost faith in the traditional religion – it was not a creed – itself a composite out of some Latin, some Etruscan, and some Greek myth and cult, they looked elsewhere for what they required. Consciences, agonized by remorse, sought expiation in secret mysteries, only to find that they afforded no relief at all. Minds craving after faith plunged into philosophic speculations that led to nothing but unsolved eternal query. Souls hungering, thirsting after God the Ideal of all that is Holy and pure and lovable, adopted the strange religions imported from the East and South; some became votaries of the Egyptian Isis and Serapis, others of the Persian Mithras – all to find that they had pursued bubbles.

In the midst of this general disturbance of old ideas, in the midst of a widespread despair, Christianity flashed forth and offered what was desired by the earnest, the thoughtful, the down-

trodden and the conscience-stricken – a revelation made by the Father of Spirits as to what is the destiny of man, what is the law of right and wrong, what is in store for those who obey the law; how also pardon might be obtained for transgression, and grace to restore fallen humanity.

Christianity meeting a wide-felt want spread rapidly, not only among the poor and oppressed, but extensively among the cultured and the noble. All connected by interest, or prejudiced by association with the dominant and established paganism, were uneasy and alarmed. The traditional religion was honeycombed and tottering to its fall, and how it was to be revived they knew not. That it would be supplanted by the new faith in Christ was what they feared.

The chief priestess of Nemausus knew that in the then condition of minds an act of overt defiance might lead to a very general apostasy. It was to her of sovereign importance to arrest the movement at once, to silence Æmilius, to have him punished for his act of sacrilege, and to recover possession of Perpetua.

She snatched the golden apple from the hand of the image, and, giving it to an attendant, said: “Run everywhere; touch and summon the Cultores Nemausi.”

The girl did as commanded. She sped among the crowd, and, with the pippin, touched one, then another, calling: “Worshippers of Nemausus, to the aid of the god!”

The result was manifest at once. It was as though an electrical shock had passed through the multitude. Those touched and those who had heard the summons at once disengaged themselves from the crush, drew together, and ceased to express their individual opinions. Indeed, such as had previously applauded the sentiments of Æmilius, now assumed an attitude of disapprobation.

Rapidly men rallied about the white-robed priestesses, who surrounded the silver image.

To understand what was taking place it is necessary that a few words should be given in explanation.

The Roman population of the towns – not in Italy only, but in all the Romanized provinces, banded itself in colleges or societies very much like our benefit clubs. Those guilds were very generally under the invocation of some god or goddess, and those who belonged to them were entitled “Cultores” or worshippers of such or such a deity. These clubs had their secretaries and treasurers, their places of meeting, their common chests, their feasts, and their several constitutions. Each society made provision for its members in time of sickness, and furnished a dignified funeral in the club Columbarium, after which all sat down to a funeral banquet in the supper room attached to the cemetery. These colleges or guilds enjoyed great privileges, and were protected by the law.

At a time when a political career was closed to all but such as belonged to the governing class, the affairs of these clubs engrossed the attention of the members and evoked great rivalry and controversies. One admirable effect of the clubs was the development of a spirit of fellowship among the members, and another was that it tended in a measure to break down class exclusiveness. Men of rank and wealth, aware of the power exercised by these guilds, eagerly accepted the offices of patron to them, though the clubs might be those of cord-wainers, armorers or sailmakers. And those who were ordinary members of a guild regarded their patrons with affection and loyalty. Now that the signal had been sent round to rally the Cultores Nemausi, every member forgot his private feeling, sank his individual opinion, and fell into rank with his fellows, united in one common object – the maintenance by every available man, and at every sacrifice, of the respect due to the god.

These Cultores Nemausi at once formed into organized bodies under their several officers, in face of a confused crowd that drifted hither and thither without purpose and without cohesion.

Æmilius found himself no longer hearkened to. To him this was a matter of no concern. He had sought to engage attention only so as to withdraw it from Perpetua and leave opportunity for her friends to remove her.

Now that this object was attained, he laughingly leaped from the balustrade and made as though he was about to return home.

But at once the chief priestess saw his object, and cried: "Seize him! He blasphemes the god, founder of the city. He would destroy the college. Let him be conveyed into the temple, that the Holy One may there deal with him as he wills."

The Prefect of Police, whose duty it was to keep order, now advanced with the few men he had deemed necessary to bring with him, and he said in peremptory tone:

"We can suffer no violence. If he has transgressed the law, let him be impeached."

"Sir," answered the priestess, "we will use no violence. He has insulted the majesty of the god. He has snatched from him his destined and devoted victim. Yet we meditate no severe reprisals. All I seek is that he may be brought into the presence of the god in the adytum, where is a table spread with cakes. Let him there sprinkle incense on the fire and eat of the cakes. Then he shall go free. If the god be wroth, he will manifest his indignation. But if, as I doubt not, he be placable, then shall this man depart unmolested."

"Against this I have naught to advance," said the prefect.

But one standing by whispered him: "Those cakes are not to be trusted. I have heard of one who ate and fell down in convulsions after eating."

"That is a matter between the god and Æmilius Varo. I have done my duty."

Then the confraternity of the Cultores Nemausi spread itself so as to encircle the place and include Æmilius, barring every passage. He might, doubtless, have escaped had he taken to his heels at the first summons of the club to congregate, but he had desired to occupy the attention of the people as long as possible, and it did not comport with his self-respect to run from danger.

Throwing over him the toga which he had cast aside when he leaped into the pond, he thrust one hand into his bosom and leisurely strode through the crowd, waving them aside with the other hand, till he stopped by the living barrier of the worshippers of Nemausus.

"You cannot pass, sir," said the captain of that party which intercepted his exit. "The chief priestess hath ordered that thou appear before the god in his cella and then do worship and submit thyself to his will."

"And how is that will to be declared?" asked the young man, jestingly.

"Sir! thou must eat one of the dedicated placenta."

"I have heard of these same cakes and have no stomach for them."

"Nevertheless eat thou must."

"What if I will not?"

"Then constraint will be used. The prefect has given his consent. Who is to deliver thee?"

"Who! Here come my deliverers!"

A tramp of feet was audible.

Instantly Æmilius ran back to the balustrade, leaped upon it, and, waving his arm, shouted:

"To my aid, Utriculares! But use no violence."

Instantly with a shout a dense body of men that had rolled into the gardens dashed itself against the ring of Cultores Nemausi. They brandished marlin spikes and oars to which were attached inflated goat-skins and bladders. These they whirled around their heads and with them they smote to the left and to the right. The distended skins clashed against such as stood in opposition, and sent them reeling backward; whereat the lusty men wielding the wind-bags thrust their way as a wedge through their ranks. The worshippers of Nemausus swore, screamed, remonstrated, but were unable to withstand the onslaught. They were beaten back and dispersed by the whirling bladders.

The general mob roared with laughter and cheered the boatmen who formed the attacking party. Cries of "Well done, Utriculares! That is a fine delivery, Wind-bag-men! Ha, ha! A hundred to five on the Utriculares! You are come in the nick of time, afore your patron was made to nibble the poisoned cakes."

The men armed with air-distended skins did harm to none. Their weapons were calculated to alarm and not to injure. To be banged in the face with a bladder was almost as disconcerting as to be

smitten with a cudgel, but it left no bruise, it broke no bone, and the man sent staggering by a wind-bag was received in the arms of those in rear with jibe or laugh and elicited no compassion.

The Utriculares speedily reached Æmilius, gave vent to a cheer; they lifted him on their shoulders, and, swinging the inflated skins and shouting, marched off, out of the gardens, through the Forum, down the main street of the lower town unmolested, under the conduct of Callipodius.

CHAPTER V

THE LAGOONS

The men who carried and surrounded Æmilius proceeded in rapid march, chanting a rhythmic song, through the town till they emerged on a sort of quay beside a wide-spreading shallow lagoon. Here were moored numerous rafts.

“Now, sir,” said one of the men, as Æmilius leaped to the ground, “if you will take my advice, you will allow us to convey you at once to Arelate. This is hardly a safe place for you at present.”

“I must thank you all, my gallant fellows, for your timely aid. But for you I should have been forced to eat of the dedicated cakes, and such as are out of favor with the god – or, rather, with the priesthood that lives by him, as cockroaches and black beetles by the baker – such are liable to get stomach aches, which same stomach aches convey into the land where are no aches and pains. I thank you all.”

“Nay, sir, we did our duty. Are not you patron of the Utriculares?”

“I am your patron assuredly, as you did me the honor to elect me. If I have lacked zeal to do you service in time past, henceforward be well assured I will devote my best energies to your cause.”

“We are beholden to you, sir.”

“I to you – the rather.”

Perhaps the reader will desire to understand who the wind-bag men were who had hurried to the rescue of Æmilius. For the comprehension of this particular, something must be said relative to the physical character of the country.

The mighty Rhône that receives the melted snows of the southern slope of the Bernese Oberland and the northern incline of the opposed Pennine Alps receives also the drain of the western side of the Jura, as well as that of the Graian and Cottian Alps. The Durance pours in its auxiliary flood below Avignon.

After a rapid thaw of snow, or the breaking of charged rain clouds on the mountains, these rivers increase in volume, and as the banks of the Rhône below the junction of the Durance and St. Raphael are low, it overflows and spreads through the flat alluvial delta. It would be more exact to say that it was wont to overflow, rather than that it does so now. For at present, owing to the embankments thrown up and maintained at enormous cost, the Rhône can only occasionally submerge the low-lying land, whereas anciently such floods were periodical and as surely expected as those of the Nile.

The overflowing Rhône formed a vast region of lagoons that extended from Tarascon and Beaucaire to the Gulf of Lyons, and spread laterally over the Crau on one side to Nîmes on the other. Nîmes itself stood on its own river, the Vistre, but this fed marshes and “broads” that were connected with the tangle of lagoons formed by the Rhône.

Arelate, the great emporium of the trade between Gaul and Italy, occupied a rocky islet in the midst of water that extended as far as the eye could reach. This tract of submerged land was some sixty miles in breadth by forty in depth, was sown with islets of more or less elevation and extent. Some were bold, rocky eminences, others were mere rubble and sand-banks formed by the river. Arelate or Arles was accessible by vessels up and down the river or by rafts that plied the lagoons, and by the canal constructed by Marius, that traversed them from Fossoe Marino. As the canal was not deep, and as the current of the river was strong, ships were often unable to ascend to the city through these arteries, and had to discharge their merchandise on the coast upon rafts that conveyed it to the great town, and when the floods permitted, carried much to Nemausus.

As the sheets of water were in places and at periods shallow, the rafts were made buoyant, though heavily laden, by means of inflated skins and bladders placed beneath them.

As the conveyance of merchandise engaged a prodigious number of persons, the raftsmen had organized themselves into the guild of Utriculares, or Wind-bag men, and as they became not infrequently involved in contests with those whose interests they crossed, and on whose privileges they infringed, they enlisted the aid of lawyers to act as their patrons, to bully their enemies, and to fight their battles against assailants. Among the numerous classic monumental inscriptions that remain in Provence, there are many in which a man of position is proud to have it recorded that he was an honorary member of the club of the inflated-skin men.

Nemausus owed much of its prosperity to the fact that it was the trade center for wool and for skins. The Cevennes and the great limestone plateaux that abut upon them nourished countless herds of goats and flocks of sheep, and the dress of everyone at the period being of wool the demand for fleeces was great; consequently vast quantities of wool were brought from the mountains of Nîmes, whence it was floated away on rafts sustained by the skins that came from the same quarter.

The archipelago that studded the fresh-water sea was inhabited by fishermen, and these engaged in the raft-carriage. The district presented a singular contrast of high culture and barbarism. In Arles, Nîmes, Narbonne there was a Greek element. There was here and there an infusion of Phœnician blood. The main body of the people consisted of the dusky Ligurians, who had almost entirely lost their language, and had adopted that of their Gaulish conquerors, the Volex. These latter were distinguished by their fair hair, their clear complexions, their stalwart frames. Another element in the composite mass was that of the colonists. After the battle of Actium, Augustus had rewarded his Egypto-Greek auxiliaries by planting them at Nemausus, and giving them half the estates of the Gaulish nobility. To these Greeks were added Roman merchants, round-headed, matter-of-fact looking men, destitute of imagination, but full of practical sense.

These incongruous elements that in the lapse of centuries have been fused, were, at the time of this tale, fairly distinct.

“You are in the right, my friends,” said Æmilius. “The kiln is heated too hot for comfort. It would roast me. I will go even to Arelate, if you will be good enough to convey me thither.”

“With the greatest of pleasure, sir.”

Æmilius had an office at Arles. He was a lawyer, but his headquarters were at Nemausus, to which town he belonged by birth. He represented a good family, and was descended from one of the colonists under Agrippa and Augustus. His father was dead, and though he was not wealthy, he was well off, and possessed a villa and estates on the mountain sides, at some distance from the town. In the heats of summer he retired to his villa.

On this day of March there had been a considerable gathering of raftsmen at Nemausus, who had utilized the swollen waters in the lagoons for the conveyance of merchandise.

Æmilius stepped upon a raft that seemed to be poised on bubbles, so light was it on the surface of the water, and the men at once thrust from land with their poles.

The bottom was everywhere visible, owing to the whiteness of the limestone pebbles and the sand that composed it, and through the water darted innumerable fish. The liquid element was clear. Neither the Vistre nor the stream from the fountain brought down any mud, and the turbid Rhône had deposited all its sediment before its waters reached and mingled with those that flowed from the Cebennæ. There was no perceptible current. The weeds under water were still, and the only thing in motion were the darting fish.

The raftmen were small, nimble fellows, with dark hair, dark eyes and pleasant faces. They laughed and chatted with each other over the incident of the rescue of their patron, but it was in their own dialect, unintelligible to Æmilius, to whom they spoke in broken Latin, in which were mingled Greek words.

Now and then they burst simultaneously into a wailing chant, and then interrupted their song to laugh and gesticulate and mimic those who had been knocked over by their wind-bags.

As Æmilius did not understand their conversation and their antics did not amuse him, he lay on the raft upon a wolfskin that had been spread over the timber, looking dreamily into the water and at the white golden flowers of the floating weeds through which the raft was impelled. The ripples caused by the displacement of the water caught and flashed the sun in his eyes like lightning.

His mind reverted to what had taken place, but unlike the raftmen he did not consider it from its humorous side. He wondered at himself for the active part he had taken. He wondered at himself for having acted without premeditation. Why had he interfered to save the life of a girl whom he had not known even by name? Why had he been so indiscreet as to involve himself in a quarrel with his fellow-citizens in a matter in no way concerning him? What had impelled him so rashly to bring down on himself the resentment of an influential and powerful body?

The youth of Rome and of the Romanized provinces was at the time of the empire very blasé. It enjoyed life early, and wearied rapidly of pleasure. It became skeptical as to virtue, and looked on the world of men with cynical contempt. It was selfish, sensual, cruel. But in Æmilius there was something nobler than what existed in most; the perception of what was good and true was not dead in him; it had slept. And now the face of Perpetua looked up at him out of the water. Was it her beauty that had so attracted him as to make him for a moment mad and cast his cynicism aside, as the butterfly throws away the chrysalis from which it breaks? No, beautiful indeed she was, but there was in her face something inexpressible, undefinable, even mentally; something conceivable in a goddess, an aura from another world, an emanation from Olympus. It was nothing that was subject to the rule. It was not due to proportion; it could be seized by neither painter nor sculptor. What was it? That puzzled him. He had been fascinated, lifted out of his base and selfish self to risk his life to do a generous, a noble act. He was incapable of explaining to himself what had wrought this sudden change in him.

He thought over all that had taken place. How marvelous had been the serenity with which Perpetua had faced death! How ready she was to cast away life when life was in its prime and the world with all its pleasures was opening before her! He could not understand this. He had seen men die in the arena, but never thus. What had given the girl that look, as though a light within shone through her features? What was there in her that made him feel that to think of her, save with reverence, was to commit a sacrilege?

In the heart of Æmilius there was, though he knew it not, something of that same spirit which pervaded the best of men and the deepest thinkers in that decaying, corrupt old world. All had acquired a disbelief in virtue because they nowhere encountered it, and yet all were animated with a passionate longing for it as the ideal, perhaps the unattainable, but that which alone could make life really happy.

It was this which disturbed the dainty epicureanism of Horace, which gave verjuice to the cynicism of Juvenal, which roused the savage bitterness of Perseus. More markedly still, the craving after this better life, on what based, he could not conjecture, filled the pastoral mind of Virgil, and almost with a prophet's fire, certainly with an aching desire, he sang of the coming time when the vestiges of ancient fraud would be swept away and the light of a better day, a day of truth and goodness would break on the tear- and blood-stained world.

And now this dim groping after what was better than he had seen; this inarticulate yearning after something higher than the sordid round of pleasure; this innate assurance that to man there is an ideal of spiritual loveliness and perfection to which he can attain if shown the way – all this now had found expression in the almost involuntary plunge into the Nemausean pool. He had seen the ideal, and he had broken with the regnant paganism to reach and rescue it.

“What, my Æmilius! like Narcissus adoring thine incomparable self in the water!”

The young lawyer started, and an expression of annoyance swept over his face. The voice was that of Callipodius.

“Oh, my good friend,” answered Æmilius, “I was otherwise engaged with my thoughts than in thinking of my poor self.”

“Poor! with so many hides of land, vineyards and sheep-walks and olive groves! Aye, and with a flourishing business, and the possession of a matchless country residence at Ad Fines.”

“Callipodius,” said the patron, “thou art a worthy creature, and lackest but one thing to make thee excellent.”

“And what is that?”

“Bread made without salt is insipid, and conversation seasoned with flattery nauseates. I have heard of a slave who was smeared with honey and exposed on a cross to wasps. When thou addressest me I seem to feel as though thou wast dabbing honey over me.”

“My Æmilius! But where would you find wasps to sting you?”

“Oh! they are ready and eager – and I am flying them – all the votaries of Nemausus thou hast seen this day. As thou lovest me, leave me to myself, to rest. I am heavy with sleep, and the sun is hot.”

“Ah! dreamer that thou art. I know that thou art thinking of the fair Perpetua, that worshiper of an – ”

“Cease; I will not hear this.” Æmilius made an angry gesture. Then he started up and struck at his brow. “By Hercules! I am a coward, flying, flying, when she is in extreme peril. Where is she now? Maybe those savages, those fools, are hunting after her to cast her again into the basin, or to thrust poisoned cakes into her mouth. By the Sacred Twins! I am doing that which is unworthy of me – that for which I could never condone. I am leaving the feeble and the helpless, unassisted, unprotected in extremity of danger. Thrust back, my good men! Thrust back! I cannot to Arelate. I must again to Nemausus!”

CHAPTER VI

THE PASSAGE INTO LIFE

Æmilius had sprung to his feet and called to the men to cease punting. They rested on their poles, awaiting further instructions, and the impetus given to the raft carried it among some yellow flags and rushes.

Callipodius said: "I mostly admire the splendor of your intellect, that shines forth with solar effulgence. But there are seasons when the sun is eclipsed or obscured, and such is this with thee. Surely thou dost not contemplate a return to Nemausus to risk thy life without being in any way able to assist the damsel. Consider, moreover – is it worth it – for a girl?"

"Callipodius," said the young lawyer in a tone of vehemence, "I cannot fly and place myself in security and leave her exposed to the most dreadful danger. I did my work by half only. What I did was unpremeditated, but that done must be made a complete whole. When I undertake anything it is my way to carry it out to a fair issue."

"That is true enough and worthy of your excellent qualities of heart and mind. But you know nothing of this wench, and be she all that you imagine, what is a woman that for her you should jeopardize your little finger? Besides, her mother and kinsfolk will hardly desire your aid, will certainly not invoke it."

"Why not?"

Callipodius shrugged his shoulders. "You are a man of the world – a votary of pleasure, and these people are Christians. They will do their utmost for her. They hang together as a swarm of bees."

"Who and what are these people – this mother and her kinsfolk?"

"I know little about them. They occupy a house in the lower town, and that tells its own tale. They do not belong to the quality to which you belong. The girl has been reputed beautiful, and many light fellows have sought to see and have words with her. But she is so zealously guarded, and is herself so retiring and modest that they have encountered only rebuff and disappointment."

"I must return. I will know for certain that she is in safety. Methinks no sooner were they balked of me than they would direct all their efforts to secure her."

"You shall not go back to Nemausus. You would but jeopardize your own valuable life without the possibility of assisting her; nay, rather wouldst thou direct attention to her. Leave the matter with me and trust my devotion to thine interests."

"I must learn tidings of her. I shall not rest till assured that she is out of danger. By the infernal gods, Callipodius, I know not what is come upon me, but I feel that if ill befall her, I could throw myself on a sword and welcome death, life having lost to me all value."

"Then I tell thee this, most resolute of men," said Callipodius, "I will return to the town. My nothingness will pass unquestioned. Thou shalt tarry at the house of Flavillus yonder on the promontory. He is a timber merchant, and the place is clean. The woman bears a good name, and, what is better, can cook well. The house is poor and undeserving of the honor of receiving so distinguished a person as thyself; but if thou wilt condescend –"

"Enough. I will do as thou advisest. And, oh, friend, be speedy, relieve my anxiety and be true as thou dost value my esteem."

Then Æmilius signed to the raftmen to put him ashore at the landing place to the timber yard of Flavillus.

Having landed he mounted a slight ascent to a cottage that was surrounded by piles of wood – of oak, chestnut, pine and olive. Flavillus was a merchant on a small scale, but a man of energy and industry. He dealt with the natives of the Cebennæ, and bought the timber they felled, conveyed it to

his stores, whence it was distributed to the towns in the neighborhood; and supplies were furnished to the shipbuilders at Arelate.

The merchant was now away, but his wife received Æmilius with deference. She had heard his name from the raftmen, and was acquainted with Callipodius, a word from whom sufficed as an introduction.

She apologized because her house was small, as also because her mother, then with her, was at the point of death from old age, not from any fever or other disorder. If Æmilius Lentulus, under the circumstances, would pardon imperfection in attendance, she would gladly extend to him such hospitality as she could offer. Æmilius would have gone elsewhere, but that the only other house he could think of that was near was a tavern, then crowded by Utriculares, who occupied every corner. He was sorry to inconvenience the woman, yet accepted her offer. The period was not one in which much consideration was shown to those in a lower grade. The citizens and nobles held that their inferiors existed for their convenience only. Æmilius shared in the ideas of his time and class, but he had sufficient natural delicacy to make him reluctant to intrude where his presence was necessarily irksome. Nevertheless, as there was no other place to which he could go, he put aside this feeling of hesitation.

The house was small, and was constructed of wood upon a stone basement. The partitions between the rooms were of split planks, and the joints were in places open, and knots had come out, so that what passed in one apartment was audible, and, to some extent, visible in another. A bedroom in a Roman house was a mere closet, furnished with a bed only. All washing was done at the baths, not in the house. The room had no window, only a door over which hung a curtain.

Æmilius divested himself of his wet garment and gave it to his hostess to dry, then wrapped himself in his toga and awaited supper.

The meal was prepared as speedily as might be. It consisted of eggs, eels, with melon, and apples of last year. Wine was abundant, and so was oil.

When he had eaten and was refreshed, moved by a kindly thought Æmilius asked if he might see the sick mother. His hostess at once conducted him to her apartment, and he stood by the old woman's bed. The evening sun shone in at the door, where stood the daughter holding back the curtain, and lighted the face of the aged woman. It was thin, white and drawn. The eyes were large and lustrous.

"I am an intruder," said the young man, "yet I would not sleep the night in this house without paying my respects to the mother of my kind hostess. Alas! thou art one I learn who is unable to escape that which befalls all mortals. It is a lot evaded only by the gods, if there be any truth in the tales told concerning them. It must be a satisfaction to you to contemplate the many pleasures enjoyed in a long life, just as after an excellent meal we can in mind revert to it and retaste in imagination every course – as indeed I do with the supper so daintily furnished by my hostess."

"Ah, sir," said the old woman, "on the couch of death one looks not back but forward."

"And that also is true," remarked Æmilius. "What is before you but everything that can console the mind and gratify the ambition. With your excellent daughter and the timber-yard hard by, you may calculate on a really handsome funeral pyre – plenty of olive wood and fragrant pine logs from the Cebennæ. I myself will be glad to contribute a handful of oriental spices to throw into the flames."

"Sir, I think not of that."

"And the numbers who will attend and the orations that will be made lauding your many virtues! It has struck me that one thing only is wanting in a funeral to make it perfectly satisfactory, and that is that the person consigned to the flames should be able to see the pomp and hear the good things said of him."

"Oh, sir, I regard not that!"

"No, like a wise woman, you look beyond."

"Aye! aye!" she folded her hands and a light came into her eyes. "I look beyond."

“To the mausoleum and the cenotaph. Unquestionably the worthy Flavillus will give you a monument as handsome as his means will permit, and for many centuries your name will be memorialized thereon.”

“Oh, sir! my poor name! what care I for that? I ask Flavillus to spend no money over my remains; and may my name be enshrined in the heart of my daughter. But – it is written elsewhere – even in Heaven.”

“I hardly comprehend.”

“As to what happens to the body – that is of little concern to me. I desire but one thing – to be dissolved, and to be with Christ.”

“Ah! – so – with Christ!”

Æmilius rubbed his chin.

“He is my Hope. He is my Salvation. In Him I shall live. Death is swallowed up in Victory.”

“She rambles in her talk,” said he, turning to the daughter.

“Nay, sir, she is clear in her mind and dwells on the thoughts that comfort her.”

“And that is not that she will have an expensive funeral?”

“Oh, no, sir!”

“Nor that she will have a commemorative cenotaph belauding her virtues?”

Then the dying woman said: “I shall live – live forevermore. I have passed from death unto life.”

Æmilius shook his head. If this was not the raving of a disordered mind, what could it be?

He retired to his apartment.

He was tired. He had nothing to occupy him, so he cast himself on his bed.

Shortly he heard the voice of a man. He started and listened in the hopes that Callipodius had returned, but as the tones were strange to him he lay down again.

Presently a light struck through a knot in the boards that divided his room from that of the dying woman. Then he heard the strange voice say: “Peace be to this house and to all that dwell therein.”

“It is the physician,” said Æmilius to himself. “Pshaw! what can he do? She is dying of old age.”

At first the newcomer did inquire concerning the health of the patient, but then rapidly passed to other matters, and these strange to the ear of the young lawyer. He had gathered that the old woman was a Christian; but of Christians he knew no more than that they were reported to worship the head of an ass, to devour little children, and to indulge in debauchery at their evening banquets.

The strange man spoke to the dying woman – not of funeral and cenotaph as things to look forward to, but to life and immortality, to joy and rest from labor.

“My daughter,” said the stranger, “indicate by sign that thou hearest me. Fortified by the most precious gift thou wilt pass out of darkness into light, out of sorrow into joy, from tears to gladness of heart, from where thou seest through a glass darkly to where thou shalt look on the face of Christ, the Sun of Righteousness. Though thou steppest down into the river, yet His cross shall be thy stay and His staff shall comfort thee. He goeth before to be thy guide. He standeth to be thy defence. The spirits of evil cannot hurt thee. The Good Shepherd will gather thee into His fold. The True Physician will heal all thine infirmities. As the second Joshua, He will lead thee out of the wilderness into the land of Promise. The angels of God surround thee. The light of the heavenly city streams over thee. Rejoice, rejoice! The night is done and the day is at hand. For all thy labors thou shalt be recompensed double. For all thy sorrows He will comfort thee. He will wipe away thy tears. He will cleanse thee from thy stains. He will feed thee with all thy desire. Old things are passed away; all things are made new. Thy heart shall laugh and sing – Pax!”

Æmilius, looking through a chink, saw the stranger lay his hand on the woman’s brow. He saw how the next moment he withdrew it, and how, turning to her daughter, he said:

“Do not lament for her. She has passed from death unto life. She sees Him, in whom she has believed, in whom she has hoped, whom she has loved.”

And the daughter wiped her eyes.

“Well,” said Æmilius to himself, “now I begin to see how these people are led to face death without fear. It is a pity that it should be delusion and mere talk. Where is the evidence that it is other? Where is the foundation for all this that is said?”

CHAPTER VII

OBLATIONS

The house into which the widow lady and her daughter entered was that used by the Christians of Nemausus as their church. A passage led into the *atrium*, a quadrangular court in the midst of the house into which most of the rooms opened, and in the center of which was a small basin of water. On the marble breasting of this tank stood, in a heathen household, the altar to the *lares et penates*, the tutelary gods of the dwelling. This court was open above for the admission of light and air, and to allow the smoke to escape. Originally this had been the central chamber of the Roman house, but eventually it became a court. It was the focus of family life, and the altar in it represented the primitive family hearth in times before civilization had developed the house out of the cabin.

Whoever entered a pagan household was expected, as token of respect, to strew a few grains of incense on the ever-burning hearth, or to dip his fingers in the water basin and flip a few drops over the images. But in a Christian household no such altar and images of gods were to be found. A Christian gave great offense by refusing to comply with the generally received customs, and his disregard on this point of etiquette was held to be as indicative of boorishness and lack of graceful courtesy, as would be the conduct nowadays of a man who walked into a drawing-room wearing his hat.

Immediately opposite the entrance into the *atrium*, on the further side of the tank, and beyond the altar to the *lares et penates*, elevated above the floor of the court by two or three white-marble steps, was a semicircular chamber, with elaborate mosaic floor, and the walls richly painted. This was the *tablinum*. The paintings represented scenes from heathen mythology in such houses as belonged to pagans, but in the dwelling of Baudillas, the deacon, the pictures that had originally decorated it had been plastered over, and upon this coating green vines had been somewhat rudely drawn, with birds of various descriptions playing among the foliage and pecking at the grapes.

Around the wall were seats; and here, in a pagan house, the master received his guests. His seat was at the extremity of the apse, and was of white marble. When such a house was employed for Christian worship, the clergy occupied the seat against the wall and the bishop that of the master in the center. In the chord of the apse above the steps stood the altar, now no longer smoking nor dedicated to the *Lar pater*, but devoted to Him who is the Father of Spirits. But this altar was in itself different wholly from that which had stood by the water tank. Instead of being a block of marble, with a hearth on top, it consisted of a table on three, sometimes four, bronze legs, the slab sometimes of stone, more generally of wood.¹

The *tablinum* was shut off from the hall or court, except when used for the reception of guests, by rich curtains running on rings upon a rod. These curtains were drawn back or forward during the celebration of the liturgy, and this has continued to form a portion of the furniture of an Oriental church, whether Greek, Armenian, or Syrian.

In like manner the *tablinum*, with its conch-shape termination, gave the type to the absidal chancel, so general everywhere except in England.

On the right side of the court was the *triclinium* or dining-room, and this was employed by the early Christians for their love-feasts.

Owing to the protection extended by law to the colleges or clubs, the Christians sought to screen themselves from persecution by representing themselves as forming one of these clubs, and affecting their usages. Even on their tombstones they so designated themselves, “*Cultores Dei*,” and they were able to carry on their worship under the appearance of frequenting guild meetings. One of the notable

¹ So represented in paintings in the Catacombs. There were two distinct types: the table in the Church and the tomb at the Sepulcher of the Martyr.

features of such secular or semi-religious societies was the convivial supper for the members, attended by all. The Church adopted this supper, called it Agape, but of course gave to it a special signification. It was made to be a symbol of that unity among Christians which was supposed to exist between all members. The supper was also a convenient means whereby the rich could contribute to the necessities of the poor, and was regarded as a fulfilment of the Lord's command: "When thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind."

Already, in the third century, the believers who belonged to the superior classes had withdrawn from them, and alleged as their excuse the command: "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsman, nor thy rich neighbors." Their actual reason was, however, distaste for associating with such as belonged to the lower orders, and from being present at scenes that were not always edifying.

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