

WHEN NERO WAS DICTATOR

by
GERALDINE CUMMINS

Introduction by
THE REV. A. H. E. LEE, M.A.

VOLUME I

WINNIPEG PSYCHIC SOCIETY

Special Edition for
PSYCHIC BOOK CLUB
144 HIGH HOLBORN, LONDON, W.C. 1

v.1 c.1

FIRST PUBLISHED BY FREDERICK MULLER LTD.

IN 1939

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY

SHERRATT AND HUGHES AT

THE SAINT ANN'S PRESS

MANCHESTER



Second Edition 1942

INTRODUCTION

THERE has always been considerable speculation as to how St. Paul spent the last years of his life. We can trace his movements up to—approximately—A.D. 62 or 63: after which a gap occurs which has never been filled in until his death which (it is generally agreed) took place in A.D. 68. Why the author of 'Acts' ends so abruptly is another question not yet finally settled: one view is that St. Luke wished to preserve a friendly attitude to the Roman authorities and forbore to dwell on the severity of the second imprisonment of the Apostle and his martyrdom. Over the infamies of Nero it was perhaps better to draw a veil. However, we have the testimony of Clement of Rome, the Muratorian Canon, St. Chrysostom and St. Jerome that the Apostle did visit Spain, as we know he intended to do. Nor does any external evidence oppose this apparently unanimous belief of the primitive Church. Yet no details of such a visit have come down to us.

All this adds immensely to the interest likely to be aroused by the script which follows. Here is a narrative which, as it were, takes up the tale where 'Acts' leaves it, and carries us on to the closing scene of the great Apostle's career. St. Luke may, or may not, show a 'tendency' in his writing by emphasizing some points and omitting others. But the script candidly tells us of the nervous attitude of many of his comrades towards Paul, 'the old sick lion', and their urging him to 'honourable retirement': and also his resistance to any such course of action. This sounds far more likely than the old critical theory of a Petrine and Pauline faction opposing each other. Then we have a description of the journey to Spain: the hostility arising there, as in so many other places: an amazing cosmic drama unveiled by an Initiate of the Mystery of the 'Green Dragon'—and one which is curiously reminiscent in certain chapters of the Book of Revelations. That pathetic personality Pomponia Græcina, of whom Tacitus tells us a little, appears in the narrative: and in stormy contrast a picture of Poppæa and the fanatical Jewish-Christian party whose denunciations of Imperial Rome afforded Nero and his creatures an easy method of evading responsibility for the Great Fire. Few scenes

could be more dramatic than the script account of the nocturnal meeting of Nero and St. Paul : and few more human touches than the yearning of the aged Apostle for the young and rather timid Timothy : or the suggestion of a certain temperamental divergence between the Apostle and the faithful St. Luke : their common faith united them but could not quite bridge the old gulf between Hebrew and Hellene.

In some ways this is perhaps the most fascinating and remarkable of all the books associated with Miss Geraldine Cummins. It should be studied as not only being of deep interest to all admirers of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, but as a notable addition to our knowledge of the ancient Roman Empire when it had passed its peak and was beginning the decline which lasted for so many centuries.

A. H. E. LEE

*St. Martin's Vicarage,
College Road, N.W.10*

NOTE

The volume here published will appear to the average reader to be of the nature of an historical romance. But it is only fair to readers to say that the work has been produced under conditions which, while they are of great interest to some, may be less attractive to others. It has, in fact, been written in trance. The sources of the narrative state themselves to be minds of an olden period having access, in ways that we cannot understand, to manuscripts and memories of the past.

We neither commit ourselves, nor wish to commit any readers to this or any theory of their origin and we trust that, as a simple narrative, the book may be appreciated and enjoyed. In so far as can be discovered, nothing is contained in the book which conflicts with such results of scholarship and research as are available to us.

THE EDITORS

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF ST. PAUL'S LIFE

A.D.

- 36 (about). Conversion of St. Paul.
- 38. Flight from Damascus.
- 39-43. Preaches in Syria and Celicia.
- 45. Visits Jerusalem and Barnabas.
- 48. First Missionary Journey.
- 51. Second Missionary Journey.
- 54. Third Missionary Journey.
- 55-56. At Ephesus.
- 57-58. At Corinth. (Epistle to Romans.)
- 59. At Cæsarea under arrest.
- 60. Shipwrecked at Malta.
- 61-63. At Rome : first trial.
- 63? After acquittal visits Macedonia and Asia Minor.
- 64-65? Visits Spain.
- 66? Visits Asia Minor.
- 67. Visits Macedonia, Ephesus and Nicopolis.
- 68. In prison at Rome : executed (? June).

(Conybeare and Howson)

CHRONOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY EVENTS

A.D.

- 42. Accession of Claudius as Emperor.
- 42-43. Invasion of Britain by Aulus Plautius.
- 50. Caractacus (Caradoc), King of Welsh Britons, captured and brought to Rome.
- 52. Claudius expels Jews from Rome.
- 54. Death of Claudius. Accession of Nero.
- 59. Murder of Agrippina.
- 61. Insurrection under Boadicea in Britain.
- 62. Nero marries Poppæa.
- 63. Nero's daughter, Claudia, born.
- 64 (July). Great fire of Rome.
- 65. Murder of Poppæa. Death of Seneca. Conspiracy of Piso.
- 66. Jewish War begins.
- 68 (June 11). Death of Nero.

CONTENTS: VOLUME I

PROLOGUE

	PAGE
<i>St. Paul's arrival in Rome: his encounter with Philemon's slave—The first trial: Paul's acquittal</i>	19

BOOK I

ST. PAUL'S TRAVELS IN SPAIN

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. <i>James, the head of the Church, bids Paul seek "honourable retirement" on his release from imprisonment</i>	30
II. <i>The fateful hour for the Western world</i>	35
III. <i>At Puteoli Paul embarks for Spain</i>	38
IV. <i>Paul cures a Gallæcian who worships Endovellicus, the god of healing</i>	40
V. <i>Paul lands at Cadiz</i>	44
VI. <i>Paul's old enemies find him in Cadiz</i>	46
VII. <i>Symphorus, the priest of the Ancient Mystery, calls Paul "a servant of evil"</i>	49
VIII. <i>Paul refuses to pay homage to the Pillars of Hercules</i>	51
IX. <i>Paul takes refuge in the mountains of Bætica with Symphorus</i>	55
X. <i>The Mystery of the Red Dragon</i>	58
XI. <i>Paul is compelled to witness the Ancient Mystery</i>	64
XII. <i>Symphorus, the Initiate, interprets the Ancient Mystery</i>	67
XIII. <i>Paul disputes with Symphorus on what they have seen</i>	74
XIV. <i>Paul is shown the last part of the Ancient Mystery</i>	79
XV. <i>Paul tells Crescens of "The Mystery of Iniquity" which he has witnessed</i>	84

CHAPTER

PAGE

- XVI. *At Seneca's birthplace Paul confounds "the wise young men"* 87
- XVII. *Paul converts Torquatus, who is later appointed the first Bishop of Spain* 92

BOOK II

ST. PETER AND ST. PAUL IN ROME

- XVIII. *The Roman World. Nero, Seneca, Poppæa, Tigellinus* 101
- XIX. *Pomponia Græcina, a Princess of Britain, said to be S. Lucinia. Her life in Rome* 104
- XX. *At Lyons Pomponia meets Paul* 109
- XXI. *Paul fails to heal Pomponia's brother. Pomponia begs Paul to go to Britannia. He promises to send Aristarchus* 112
- XXII. *The Empress Poppæa sees Paul secretly* 118
- XXIII. *Peter meets Paul in Rome and tells him how James, the Apostle, died* 121
- XXIV. *The Empress Poppæa commands Narcissus to act as a spy on the Christians. Tabeel's vision of the Great Fire of Rome* 128
- XXV. *Peter and Paul converse together on the Alban hills* 134

PROLOGUE

"And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him."—ACTS xxviii. 30.

IT was at the end of winter that Paul and the little company of the brethren entered Rome by the Porta Capena. The saint walked between two soldiers, and his wrists were bound to theirs by chains.

The sun shone and it seemed that spring already knocked upon the door of the hours. Along the Sacred Way the people of many nations passed, and Paul, who saw more things than the ordinary man, was uplifted when he perceived the number of the races and overheard strange tongues and reckoned that, in that time, the Sacred Way contained a little image of the whole world, or rather, an assembly of all kinds of men, of rich and poor, of slaves of divers nations and of every colour.

Here were white-robed Arabs and there wandered Gauls with blond heads and garbed in strange coats and breeches. Jews walked softly by, wearing the white tunic without ornament that set them apart from the Gentiles; and in and out among the strollers went Greeks intermingling with Spaniards and slaves from Africa whose faces, dark as pitch, stood out against the scarlet and gold garments which had been put upon them for the glory of their masters. And these masters—Roman nobles, wealthy freedmen—travelled in richly adorned litters; some conversing with painted harlots while the sun rays fell upon the gilded armour of the Prætorian guards as they marched by.

Amid all this show of wealth and ease there was a display of pitiful poverty. Blind men led by dogs sought to approach the guarded litters and beg from their occupants some small offering. Crippled children, going on sticks and in rags, prayed the passers-by for money or some token to buy them food. Priests of Isis also sought alms from rich patrons for their goddess.

And as the babel of many tongues rose upon the air Paul said to Luke: "It hath been well appointed that I should come unto this city, for it is as the axle round which the whole world of man doth turn. Here, verily, we shall win for Christ men

of every nation, and they shall journey back to their own countries, bearing their people the seed of the Word."

But when the saint had been given up by the centurion to the rulers he was constrained to abide in one house and might only, for a short while in the day, walk abroad in fetters in a chosen place. So it was needful that the people should come to him, and first he would speak with the men of his own race. Wherefore a saint named Justus sought out the chief Rabbi in Rome, and on one windy evening he visited Paul.

Yet before these two had come to an end of their conversation with one another the saint's mind and heart were as stirred in tumult as the gusty tempest that blew and raged without. For the Rabbi was cold of temper; he had the glassy spider's eye and would not declare his thoughts, seeking rather to lead the saint on to betray himself in some manner in his speech. This pillar of Israel disclosed naught concerning his intention whether ill or good towards the brethren and their belief in the Messiah. But in the next week he appeared in the early day, and with him were elders and men of account among the Jews. These sat about the saint in a circle, or at times they would rise up and, in twos and threes, draw away from him, muttering and shaking their heads.

They were like a flock of birds that peck at one small ailing sparrow. Hour by hour they tormented Paul with crafty sayings concerning rites and observances, and it was clearly their purpose to ensnare him in a skein of quibbling words. But the saint knew that the Rabbi lied when he said that no ill tidings had been borne to him concerning Paul of Tarsus, and that it was his purpose, by such speech, to lead Paul to reveal his defence. Then his accusers might be armed with knowledge when he appeared at Cæsar's judgment seat.

Howbeit, the press of affairs at court did not permit in that season of the trial of an unknown Jew, who was of little or no account to the Romans in high places. So, as the days passed, the elders visited Paul only that they might bait him and prove him to be a puffed-up fool without learning, a busybody to be humbled and proved a liar.

The simple, noble sayings of this great Master of Tarsus passed them by like the Euroclydon. These learned elders could not open their hearts to the truth, for they were set in their ways of thought and in the hard and fast observances of the Law.

So Paul persuaded few Jews of authority in that first year of his imprisonment, and he was sore spent through many hours passed in a waste of argument. Wherefore he determined that

he would speak no more with the Jews of repute in Rome and he bade Timothy and Luke seek out the Gentiles and the slaves, for these would hearken to his tidings.

And it was so. Day by day the afflicted, the outcasts and the poor came and sat at his feet and were converted by his oratory into believers in the truth. Among these were a number of poor and ignorant Jews—hawkers and pedlars of wares—and these accepted the sayings of the Master of Tarsus, believing in his words.

Now day and night Paul was bound by a chain to a soldier, and many of these soldiers believed also, some even being baptized. Then, when they were on guard at the palace they conversed with the slaves of Cæsar's household, telling them of the Seer who had come out of the east, who bore tidings of a great and mighty God who had triumphed over all the lesser gods, putting them under his feet.

In such simple manner did they tell of Paul and his gospel; and the slaves of Augustus became curious, and they, too, went in to hearken to the saint. So, despite his weariness, he was of good heart, for these Gentiles hungered and thirsted for the truth, and it seemed that it might in time, through them, be heard by the patricians and by the young Cæsar, the ruler of the world.

"I beseech thee for my son Onesimus . . . For perhaps he, therefore, departed for a season, that thou shouldst receive him for ever."

—THE EPISTLE OF PAUL TO PHILEMON.

One evening after their labours in the Porta Capena Timothy and Luke hastened to Paul's hired house. It was a night without stars and Timothy, in that blind dark, stumbled upon a heap that lay across his road. Luke carried a lantern beneath his cloak, not showing it; for in certain streets there was danger from wild men and robbers once night fell. He cast the ray of the lantern upon the wasted shape of a man. There was no flesh upon his bones, and he lay there as one dead.

"Almost this fellow hath perished from hunger," said the physician, seeking with his hand the pulse of life in his breast. And as life still flickered within him they carried him to Paul's house, it being near. And after a while when his spirit returned from the shadows, he gazed at them in terror, trembling like a beaten dog.

Only with difficulty did they learn that he was named Onesimus and that he was a slave.

In the days that followed his silence remained unbroken. He lay in Paul's room indifferent to all that went on around him, paying no heed to those people who came and went in the day-time. Only in the night did he toss to and fro and cry out as if in torment. Paul did not speak to him but sought to give of that peace which is best rendered in silence and with the gentle touch of the hand.

Always this slave was most afraid of the guard chained to Paul. But once in the midmost part of the night the saint roused up; and perceiving that the soldier was sleeping and the eyes of Onesimus were upon him, he spoke saying:

"Brother, there is some sore trouble that weighs heavily upon thy mind. Share this burden with me; for I but live to share the burdens of the sorrowful and the afflicted in heart."

And Onesimus made eager answer, "Master, I would I could share my secret with thee. For I perceive that thou art not as others. But I dare not trust any man because of the punishment."

"And what is this punishment?"

"I shall be taken up; my hands bound to beams of wood. Then they will scourge me until I faint away. And after that they will wait until the flesh has healed, and then they will once more scourge me until my flesh is one flame of agony. Master, it is so hard to die, and I am afraid. For when they have thus tormented me for many days they will, if I still live, send me to the quarries. And thou knowest that there every indignity, every insult is heaped upon the prisoner. They do not let us die swiftly, they make us labour night and day. Every torment, every filthiness is practised upon us. And when at last we are released by death we are no longer men but crazed beasts."

Here Paul held up his hand saying, "Be not afraid. Tell me thine offence, and it may well be that I can offer salvation."

"Dare I trust any man?" inquired the slave.

And Paul answered: "Through ignorance, stupidity, or folly all men betray at one time or other in their lives, but I will never betray thee." He hung his head in shame and whispered, "For once I betrayed the Son of God."

For a space there was an awesome silence in that room. Only the breathing of the sleeping soldier fluttered the dark.

Onesimus laid his hand upon Paul's hand, saying softly, "Master, that was the last bitterness."

And Paul wept, for he was weak in body, having been so long

in bonds. Then the slave knew that he might share his burden with this aged man. He spoke eagerly:

"I am a Phrygian. The merchants took me into the market and because of my debts sold me as a slave. Men came and handled my body as if I were some beast. With whips they drove me round and round. They opened my mouth, they smote me here and there, valuing me. And because I am mean of stature they passed me by with insult and mockery. At last a man named Philemon gave for me the price demanded. But I swore that I, who am a Phrygian of good family, would not submit to the indignity of serving another. Thou art a nobleman, thou knowest not the miserable plight of the slaves. We may not marry, we may only, with the permission of our master, take a concubine. We have no money, no freedom. And I have known a slave, who was in another household, crucified because he shattered a precious vase valued by his master. So in my rage and fear I stole money from Philemon and fled from his house and Colossæ. Since then I have wandered from one place of hiding to another, and I am always, night and day, afraid. There is no place in the known world where I may rest in safety. For everywhere I go I am under Roman authority. And if even this guard who sleeps beside thee knew I was an escaped slave, he would hale me before authority, and I would suffer all those torments I have related to thee in this past hour."

Then Paul assured Onesimus that he was safe in his charge. They spoke together until the dawn lightened the dark, Paul reasoning with this man concerning Christ, saying:

"He made Himself of no reputation and took upon Himself the form of a servant." And Onesimus was comforted by these words and he fell asleep. But this time his slumber was not harried by his dreams. It was peaceful as that of a little child.

Now Philemon had lately become a Christian. He was a good man and Paul knew that he was steadfast in the truth and wrestled with the Libertine heresy that like some strong weed had sprung up in the Church at Colossæ and almost had choked the life from it. Trusting this man, Paul determined that Onesimus should return to his master. The saint spoke of this project to the stricken slave, who for a long while remained stubborn, refusing to become once more the servant of another.

But one day, calling Timothy to him, the saint indited a letter to Philemon commending as a well-beloved brother Onesimus, the erstwhile slave.

This letter was shown to Onesimus and he learned that Paul

offered payment and the restitution of the stolen money. Perceiving in it also the fine exhortations to mercy that were ever upon the lips of the Seer of Tarsus, the Phrygian at last agreed to return to Colossæ and surrender up himself to Philemon.

But he was faint of heart and fearful when, on the day of his departure, he asked for the blessing of Paul. And again the saint exhorted him, as a believer in Christ, to be of good cheer. For Philemon would be a brother and not a master to the slave who had wronged him in the past. And this was so. Trust met with trust.

Philemon appointed Onesimus steward of his house and placed him in charge of his possessions. From that day till his death the forgiven slave never failed his master and became the first in the congregation of the brethren at Colossæ.

It was during the second year of Paul's imprisonment in his house in Rome that Aristarchus discovered that there was little money left in the treasury. The saint was generous of heart and overlavish in his gifts to the poor. Many people came daily to hearken to his sayings, but he would not ask gifts of them lest they should doubt the good news of the Gospel. Wherefore the brethren were troubled. For if their master was without means he would be cast into the common prison and must speedily perish there from hardship.

Now the saint was loath to ask for gifts from any man and for a while remained stubborn, declaring that he was prepared to go into the common prison. But Luke and Aristarchus called to his mind that the Philippians had ministered to his necessities when he was in Macedonia and had given without murmuring or questioning. So, in time, the saint consented to their setting out for Philippi bearing a letter to them. But he was cast down in spirit, fearing lest he had been importunate in his demand. However, Epaphroditus came in all haste from Philippi, bearing a good sum with him and the greetings of the saints in that city to their well-loved master.

So Paul continued to live in his own house in Rome, and Epaphroditus was as a physician and a zealous son to the saint until of a sudden he became sick of a fever and was like to die. Indeed tidings of his state and that he would die were borne to Philippi, and his kindred grieved for him until news came that he had mended once more.

Many were the cares that besieged the prisoner in that year. He searched his mind diligently for right doctrine to give to his scribe when he learned of heresies in Asia and of the Church being menaced with division in Colossæ. But all such matters were set aside when it was known that Paul of Tarsus was shortly to appear before the Prefect of the Prætorian Guard, who would minister justice for Cæsar in the case of this Roman citizen.

There was a first hearing when testimonies were taken and two Romans of repute declared Paul to be a man of honour and good reputation, a loyal subject of Cæsar.

Now in Rome and in the Imperial Palace there was much talk because Paul was held in bondage without trial for two years. Such indignity and shame, it was said, should not have been put upon a Roman citizen because certain Pharisees made accusations against him. Yet now, when brought before his judge, Paul, fearing they might suffer hurt for doing so, refused to allow any of his disciples to speak in his defence.

A crafty Roman advocate summoned witnesses who all spoke against the prisoner, uttering falsehoods that might easily have been refuted, but many Gentiles came forward and bore favourable witness to his character and to his conduct during his sojourn in Rome. Nevertheless Paul knew that he alone could give the sure testimony that might win the judge by its truth. So putting his faith in God he faced his accusers.

It was a lonely hour. He stood there steadfast, hearkening to the quibbling words with which the Pharisees strove to weave a net about him. When they had finished he spoke out bravely and strongly, but the advocate brought forward fresh evidence of the riots and tumults Paul had caused in Ephesus and in Corinth.

"In whatever town this seditious fellow enters," declared his accusers, "the peace of the community is menaced. And no city will keep him for any long time, for he is cast out. And if now he be given his liberty he will set all men by the ears and cause strife and rebellion in Rome."

Here the Prefect held up his hand, and signed that he would deliver judgment. He spoke few words; but these were well chosen. First he said, "The prisoner is a Roman citizen. Let us bear in mind its significance in a town like Jerusalem where there are many Jews opposed to Roman rule. Will not such people seek to persecute and harry any Roman citizen who is of honourable estate and exposes himself to their wrath? I ask this question, and ye all know the answer to it. Secondly, I have here the testimony to Paul's honour and integrity, not only from men of repute in Rome,

but also from the highest in another land. Agrippa, the king, has spoken well of him, and his words show that there is naught against the prisoner, nay, rather that the offence lies with his accusers who have shamefully treated this Roman citizen and learned man of Tarsus."

With that the Prefect commanded that Paul should be set free and declared that he was blameless, having in no way offended against Cæsar or the Roman Law.

So at the close of the year there came an end to Paul's two years of imprisonment, his testimony having been written on parchment and read to the Prefect. Yet what counted with this judge was the word of Agrippa and his own feeling of bitterness against highly placed Jews in Jerusalem. He would not accept the tales told by witnesses of brawls and tumults stirred up by the prisoner in Corinth, Ephesus, and other cities of the Empire.

BOOK I

ST. PAUL'S TRAVELS IN SPAIN

THE WARRIOR-SAINT

PAUL was as the eagle of the hills yearning to take flight. He would span the whole known world with his wings before he might rest. Yet for more than two years he had been deprived of liberty, for more than two years lying in bonds at Rome.

When he walked abroad with his guard one ankle was fastened by a loose chain to the other, and his hands were bound. In the chamber of his house a great chain, fastened to a ring in the wall, was wound about his middle, so that he could but traverse three or four cubits and no more. Thus was he straitly confined, and his spirit chafed within him; for he desired greatly to be gone to Spain, yea and to Gaul and, peradventure, to cross the cold northern sea, seeking out the barbarians who dwelt in Britannia and Hibernia, those strange isles of mist that rest in the path of the setting sun.

Howbeit, Paul's imprisonment in Rome was a time of much gain for the Church. Peter declared that in truth the Saint of Tarsus was a mightier adversary of Satan when he lay in bonds than when he journeyed from city to city, from nation to nation. But then Peter somewhat feared the gall that his brother caused to rise in the hearts of the people, and he feared the tumults and battles that ever and always raged if Paul came forth, as was his wont, and spoke in the market-place. Truly this saint stirred up more choler within the Empire than any other known subject of the Cæsars. But his fire cleansed as well as burned. It destroyed old follies and superstitions, all the vanities and abominable delights of the heathen.

CHAPTER I

A CENTURION bore the tidings to the little house, where gathered the brethren, that Cæsar desired that Paul should go free, that no stain or soil tarnished his character.

When the chains were loosed and fell away two faithful women, Phoebe and Claudia, bore a basin of water and certain precious ointment within the chamber. They bathed the sores on their master's wrists, feet and body. For the chains had eaten almost to the bone. Truly Paul had withered with the passing of the seasons of captivity. He was dull of eye, wasted in all his members, and he had suffered pain daily and nightly, so that the brethren, who had lain at the beginning of winter in the chamber beneath, slept not because of the moans that came from above them and wrung their hearts. In the daytime Paul never cried out, for the brethren then kept him company. Only in the dark hours did he thus, at times, cry his bodily anguish.

A new white tunic and robe were set upon Paul, and Phoebe and Claudia laid meat before him and before the other saints. They ate and were filled, and they made merry, rejoicing in their master's freedom.

Having spoken courteously to each one of them, Paul beckoned to the elders in the company, and they withdrew with him. These numbered eight or nine; among them were Mark, Linus, who is known as Ansus, Trophimus, Crescens, Andronicus, Junias, Luke, and Aristarchus. During the time of his imprisonment the saint had busied himself mightily with the shaping and designing of the Church, so that it should make one whole. Wherefore, Timothy, Titus, Aquila, and many another beloved of him were in Asia, Crete, and Hellas, guiding the communities in those lands. Twice in the year the chief of each cluster of churches sent his messenger or came himself to Rome, bearing tidings of this work and receiving further counsel from Paul concerning it. So, in these two years of bondage, he had achieved the desire of his soul and the Church was ready to face any storm.

Though Paul had fretted much because he could not spread the truth abroad to people in distant lands, he was of good heart as he believed that he might shortly depart into Spain. Yet

he was in a measure bound to consider the wishes of this council of brethren who gathered about him. For all were zealous workers who had sacrificed much in the service of the Church. Here stood Linus, selected by Peter, one who had given up all for Christ; there was Aristarchus of Macedonia, who had chosen to be Paul's slave and fellow prisoner, though he had been a rich man, honoured by his own people. And there rested Luke, tender and compassionate, the healer of many hurts, the trusted brother; and Mark's grey hairs testified to his sufferings and to his labours. Crescens, young and fiery of temper, was another chosen weapon, who, because of his knowledge of the barbarians, served Paul well in counsel; lastly Trophimus, a zealous preacher, messenger and scribe.

Gazing upon them all, the aged saint shed tears of joy and pressed each one to his bosom. Then, when all were seated, they communed together concerning the affairs of the Church; and Paul held back from speaking of the yearning of his soul, so greatly did he fear the judgment of his council in the matter.

Linus presented him with letters from Peter which commended his discretion and his zeal. "We name Ansus, who is called Linus, Overseer of the Church at Rome." Such was the pith of these epistles, and they further prayed that Paul would look with favour on his choice.

The Saint of Tarsus declared his unfeigned gladness, welcoming this brother as the other brethren. "I am but a wayfarer," said he; "and will speedily depart from Rome. Wherefore I am rejoiced that my place is now filled, and I am free to go."

Then the councillors looked at one another, but said no word, though there was uneasiness in the hearts of certain among them. Mark and Linus were well acquainted with the fears of the Apostles in Jerusalem concerning a freed Paul. They held him to be in the semblance of a lion, a noble beast, kingly in his ways, but one who was too ready to give battle, too bold in his manners, thus giving offence to both Jews and Romans. So there had been much debate among the elders in the Church at Jerusalem when rumour was borne to them that Paul would soon gain his freedom. "Of a surety if he goeth again to Asia and to Hellas he will raise up enmity among our countrymen," they declared; "these will lodge their complaints against him and against us also at Jerusalem and we shall be undone." Wherefore, having learned that in the last year of imprisonment Paul had been near to death through a sore fever, they perceived a means whereby they might

dissuade this sick and wasted "lion of Tarsus" from setting forth once again upon his journeys.

And now Linus rose up in the midst of the council and asked of Paul if he might read to all present a letter written by the chief of the Apostles in Jerusalem. And the saint bade him declare it, though his countenance betrayed discomfiture at such a letter being thus openly spoken of in the midst of the brethren in that season.

Linus declared only the first sentences, knowing that they alone were of account in the matter :

"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus in the name of the Apostles to our beloved brother, Paul, greetings.

"We are mindful of thy many afflictions, and sorrow because of the great sickness which we learn hath fallen upon thee and wasted all thy strength.

"Howbeit, we rejoice, inasmuch as we have learned that thou wilt speedily be granted thy freedom. We have well considered all thy labours for Christ, all thy sufferings, and we hold thy life precious and desire that thy days shall be long in the land. Wherefore, we pray thee to withdraw from this present world into an honourable retirement. Our brother Luke, we know, will tend and care for thee in such well-earned repose. And we are persuaded that thou wilt perform a great work, render a noble service to our Lord Jesus if thou dost abide thus in the one place which will be favourable to thy health, and dost there, in prayer and in writing, bear testimony to the truth and to the life of our Master Christ."

Here Linus halted in his speech, and, on being prayed to continue by Mark, he read but the last words of the letter wherein James declared that it was the will of the Apostles that Paul should thus enter upon quiet days in a serviceable retirement. "Truly, brother, thy warfare is accomplished, and thou wilt best labour for Christ in the manner which we have herein declared unto you."

Now, for an instant, Paul shook as with a palsy, so grieved was he by this command of the Apostles. It seemed to make light of his labours as a preacher and traveller for the faith. It was as if, like a worn-out garment, he was being cast aside; and the brethren watched in silence, fearing to say any word.

Then, of a sudden, the trembling ceased and Paul called to

Aristarchus, saying, "Thou canst give us tidings of Spain. Declare them to us now."

"In my youth," said Aristarchus, "when I knew nought of Christ I journeyed into Spain, and I was amazed by the number of its people, by the riches of this land. I traversed the Hither and the Further Provinces and encountered learned Romans, merchantmen of Israel, and the old race which abode in that country before the coming of Cæsar's eagles. Verily, Spain harboureth a strong people who, having mastered the subtle teachings of the philosophers, still hold fast to many and vain superstitions. Nevertheless, these people are of great account before God, and because their influence in the world is great, we must win them for Christ."

"Yea, I am of the one mind with thee in this matter," said Paul.

"But thou mayest not go thyself to Spain," cried Luke. "Let the younger brethren serve in this matter."

"Yea, I am well acquainted with certain Jews and Gentiles who are of this country," declared Andronicus. "So Aristarchus and I, if it please thee, will journey into Spain, bearing with us the words of Paul."

And, speaking as his physician, Luke pleaded that Paul should rest awhile by the sea nigh Puteoli. "After two seasons have passed thou mayest again take up the staff and scrip of the traveller and face the road."

"What of the brethren in Asia and Macedonia who yearn to see my face again?"

Trophimus made answer, "Master, abide by the counsel of the physician. I will bear letters from thee to the brethren in those lands."

Then Mark and Linus called to Paul's mind the counsel of the Apostles, and they steadfastly fastened their gaze upon him, declaring with their eyes what they dared not utter with their tongues: that the commands of the Twelve Apostles might not be put aside by any one member of the Church.

Now Aristarchus was silent all this while, so Paul turned to him, saying, "What is thy counsel concerning my life which seemeth of great import to all the brethren?"

Aristarchus made swift answer, "Better lack bread than lack life, better the torment of bodily infirmities than the torment of the spirit."

"Thou hast well said," Paul smiled sorrowfully. "Brethren, I cannot rest."

And Mark made answer, "Thou art precious in our sight. Verily, thou wilt perish if thou goest once more on thy journeys. The physician has spoken. Heed him."

"Master, thou art broken. Seek thy earned repose," exhorted Linus.

"Aristarchus and I will bear thy messages to Spain," declared Andronicus.

"Nay, nay," cried Aristarchus; "I will not go to the Hither or the Further Provinces in the company of Andronicus. There is but one man in all the world who can light the lamp of faith in Spain, yea in Gaul, and that is Paul of Tarsus, Paul, chief of all the saints, my one and only master among men."

And Paul gently chid him for thus raising up an unworthy brother to such a proud place. But his voice fell away into silence as once more Linus spoke the will of the Apostles and demanded obedience to their commands.

And now it seemed as if Paul must yield, as if at least he should, for a season, withdraw into retirement. What saint might gainsay those disciples who had walked with Jesus, the Christ, and not greatly err in such defiance when thus their will was plainly declared?

Paul closed his eyes, praying silently for a brief space, seeking light and counsel. Then he opened them once more, saying, "Come, let us fast, brethren, and pray. To-morrow we shall partake of the Cup of Remembrance; and after that we shall keep the Hour of the Watch and seek the counsel of God as given by the Holy Spirit. I promise thee that if I am bidden to seek retirement and quiet days on to-morrow's eve I will obey. For no man among us may disobey the Word of God given through His Holy Spirit to us weak sinners."

CHAPTER II

MARK, Linus, Trophimus, Aristarchus, Crescens, Lucas, Andronicus and Junia, all gathered together after fasting and prayer in the upper chamber of Paul's hired house.

The darkness gathered, swiftly covering up Rome with its wings. The sound of street brawling and the songs of the people passed and ceased, a great wind blew and rain fell heavily upon the earth.

Paul tarried. No man dared summon him. They did but kindle two rushlights, setting them in rings that were welded into the walls.

At last he entered the chamber, and with humility asked Linus to bless all who were present, for he said, "I am least among ye all, brethren, a worn tool, whose blade is blunted; wherefore I am of no more service to anyone of ye who are in the bloom of your years, strong in faith and in understanding."

No man dared answer this saying; but they were filled with shame. At times the saint had an edge upon his speech which did wound and all these men knew well that their labours, their sacrifices, were as naught beside those of Paul of Tarsus.

Again he spoke, asking Linus to commence with prayer. Humbly this brother hastened to obey, though he greatly desired that the Apostle should thus take the leadership. But he feared rebuke, feared the sternness that glimmered in the eyes of the Master of Tarsus.

And when prayer had been offered and the Great Words of Life spoken all partook of the Cup of Remembrance. There then stole within that chamber the peace that quells bitterness, the peace that consumes meanness of spirit and pride, the noble peace that passes man's understanding. It reigned within the hearts of all, so that they were gathered within Christ in that hour, their hearts and minds lifted up to the lofty places beyond the ken of men.

And behold, the noise of the rain and the wind passed from their hearing as they seemed to dwell, in this Hour of the Watch, in another world, remote from the Babylon which surrounded their fleshly bodies in that time.

Now there is a fine shape which is called the Image of the man. It is of a substance akin to the flesh, yet is invisible; and there is also that companion of man, the Body of Light,¹ in which his spirit abides, and through it he may send messages to the man's soul, the Image Body² and the body of the flesh. In the Hour of the Watch, if the Body of Light be pure and without soil, the soul of the man may withdraw from it and the great spirits, or even the Holy Spirit, may enter therein and speak the Word of the Highest.

So it came to pass that, in this Holy Hour, Paul's spirit withdrew from his Shape of Light. Slowly the Mystery was accomplished, though, to the eyes of the men present, it seemed only that the saint had fallen into a deep sleep or swoon.

A soft chill air blew through the chamber and the rushlights danced and winked. Then a pale mist enveloped them and their light was dimmed. Now were the minds of the brethren drawn back from that other world of being, and they gazed eagerly upon Paul, who lay there bent and shrunken, his countenance still as a stone. And all grew afraid as time passed and he made no stir, and the vapour thickened about them. They yearned to pray, to cry out their strange fear, but dumbness locked their tongues. So they bowed themselves forward, thus making obeisance to the Mighty Presence that filled the lone chamber, holding all fast.

Soon, as little stars dance upon the hill-tops, so did little lights flit to and fro, and the dimness passed. A radiance came out from the person of Paul, and slowly it was shaped into the likeness of an angel. Then the brethren bowed to the ground before it, and they were awake and in no dream; for all heard the same speech, words that were spoken to Linus, known as Ansus, now chief elder in that gathering.

"Behold, I bear to thee the Will of the Most High, and it may not be gainsaid by any man. Thou art Overseer of the Church in Rome, and thou shalt declare it to the brethren.

"Let Paul, our servant, gird up his loins in this season, gather to him trusty companions and seek a ship which will carry him to Spain. He is bidden make haste, for his years are numbered, and he may not tarry in one place any long time. The salt wind, the sea wind will cleanse his body and the Spirit will nourish his strength. Wherefore, we conjure thee, Linus, known

¹ "The Body of Light", sometimes called the Guardian Angel or Higher Genius.

² "The Image Body" is probably the Etheric Body.

as Ansus, to make smooth the road of Paul: that he may depart as speedily as his course can be shaped. He shall journey through Spain into Gaul, where the word of the Holy Spirit will again be declared to him."

Linus strove to speak, but he could not make any sound. The breezes blew through that chamber, the little stars came again, were whirled and tossed about, and other voices were heard. Then slowly did the radiance and the glory fade; the Shape of Light passed from the sight of the brethren, and they were aware only that with a loud noise of thunder the Mighty Presence swept from that chamber, and the quiet of earth gathered within it once again.

In all that time Paul lay as a sleeper who has passed beyond the borders of dream, so tosses not to and fro, but lies still. His lips framed no speech, his limbs made no sign. He was held fast within that Holy One who possessed him, who entered his Body of Light, and declared the Will of God.

CHAPTER III

IN the early day Linus the Overseer came to Paul while still he rested on his couch. And he spoke humbly, saying, "Master, thou hast been chosen by the Lord. Strange and marvellous were the signs shown us on that other eve. Verily, the Holiest of Holies came and dwelled within thee and about our company in that season." Then Linus spoke the command given him concerning the journey into Spain.

And Paul made answer, "This message be of God. Of a surety, therefore, the will of the Apostles must be set aside. They are but mortal men, and, I understand, did not, on the matter of my honourable retirement, seek the Word of the Holy Spirit."¹

Linus declared that this was so, and agreed that Paul should rise up instantly and make ready to sail from Puteoli into Spain. However, he lay in a great weakness though his spirit burned as a fire. So the brethren bore him to a litter, and his journey to Puteoli was set within a number of days.

The saint fretted and wept as he waked to each dawn, fearing lest delay would lead to further hindrances being placed in his path. But the first vision of the sea and the ships calmed his mind, giving him faith once more. Then when he lay down to rest in a house in Puteoli ague seized him, and a great sweat broke out upon his body. And again the brethren prayed that he should tarry until the summer in that town.

It was the season of early spring, a time when all life stirred, and the stirring also chafed the mighty spirit of the Master of

¹ "At that time the Apostles in Jerusalem were James, Peter, John, Matthew and another James; also Thaddaeus and Andrew. The others who had walked with the Master were either dead or upon a journey. But their places were filled by certain who are numbered among the Seventy Disciples. The Company of Twelve remained in Jerusalem thus until the days of the Afflictions. If one was away upon a journey another sat in his place and gave counsel. Truly Paul was, to them, a sorry burden for they were troubled inasmuch as he would not abide by any counsel of the Brethren. Always he chose to be master, while, as James declared, he kept crying his weakness and deriding his many faults. But still he would claim the right to walk as he pleased, though he declared it was not as he pleased, but according to the Will of the Holy Spirit."

Tarsus, and he would not heed the counsel and prayers of those who loved him.

A vessel, which had borne corn to Italy from Gades,¹ was to depart on the second day following the Sabbath, and there was room for travellers in it. Wherefore the saint declared that even if he lay nigh to death, he should be carried aboard this ship on the eve before she set sail.

The brethren durst not gainsay him, and so was his command fulfilled. The ague had now passed, but Paul could not walk because of the feebleness of his limbs. Howbeit, the shipmaster was old and cunning in the craft of the sea, and he promised a fair journey. So were the sorrowful company of the Roman saints a little eased in mind, though, to the last, they entreated Paul to give way and suffer them to bear him to the shore. But by reason of his weariness he could only whisper his will, he bade them leave him in peace, for he would not be turned from his purpose by any mortal man.

Thus did the old sick lion of Tarsus gain his way, and therewith, he made the sign of blessing, for he could not speak any more. Then the weeping brethren bowed themselves down bidding him farewell.

¹ Cadiz.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Paul, Luke, Aristarchus, Andronicus and Crescens set forth upon the new enterprise, God's candles made a festival of the dark. Gladly Paul bade farewell to the coasts of Italy, turning his face towards the west. No cloud shadowed the world and the moon cut a silver path through the waves, beckoning the ship forward. It was a comfortable vessel, robed in full-bellied sails within which whispered the breezes of the night.

The word of the Spirit was fulfilled. Paul rose up and walked upon the deck; pain departed; his freed limbs failed not. To and fro he went, joying in the glimmering dark, speaking merry sentences to Luke and Aristarchus upon whose arms he leant. His was as the heart of a wild sea-bird, he ever drew strength from the murmuring waves, health and gladness from the winds that chase above the wide waters. His mind became as a glass in such a time and could perceive the clear image of the Spirit's will. Wherefore Luke perceived that his own wisdom as a physician was as naught when the High Wisdom spoke; inasmuch as this gentle sea bore with it healing and peace.

The shipmaster judged aright. No foul weather met his barque. In the days that followed it sailed smoothly across quiet waters. And Paul delighted in the life about him, speaking with sailors and Gentiles, seeking to learn the minds of all those who journeyed in that boat. For he eagerly sought among these wayfarers and mariners some gracious spirit who might be ready to receive the word of truth or could provide him with knowledge concerning the land to which he was bound.

A soldier, a Gallæcian,¹ held much speech with the saint and told the tale of his life—of the wars with the barbarians and of the honour awarded him after battle. And soon Paul perceived that this stranger gave thought to the things of the spirit though he was wholly ignorant and worshipped many gods.

Having declared his joy in thus returning to Gades, the town of his birth, he became curious and questioned Paul, saying: "Is it not true that thou art a Jew as well as a Roman citizen?"

¹ Gallæcia, part of North-Western Spain.

"Yea, thou hast named my state."

"The Hebrews are verily a curious people," continued the Gallæcian, "and I am told that they are, in some respects, akin to my people in their beliefs. We Gallæcians hold the boar to be sacred, and his image is set upon my standard. The Jews also worship the swine, holding his flesh to be sacred. Neither they nor we of Hispania will partake of it as do the Romans, who are a gross people."

And Paul made swift answer, "Nay, we Jews do not worship the swine. Our God calleth him unclean, and therefore we may not eat of his flesh."

Then this simple soldier cried out in astonishment, and Paul perceived that it would be hard to overcome his superstition in such a matter. So he spoke to him in plain sentences, as if he were reasoning with a little child.

"It is folly to worship bird, beast or fish. Art thou not greater in understanding than the boar of the forest? He desireth only to eat and be filled and to beget his kind. Thou goest on two legs and he on four. Thou canst journey to the stars upon the wings of thine understanding, whilst he noseth among the roots of the ground for his nourishment." And many other words Paul spoke, declaring at last that Name above every name and striving to show that there was but one King of Kings, one Lord of Lords.

And the Gallæcian eagerly hearkened as he rested at the feet of Paul. He suffered from the pain of an old wound in his hinderparts, and he lay thus so that he might obtain ease from its sore pricking.

Now his countenance lighted up and he said, "I would gladly worship this powerful God. Tell me more concerning Him. My life, friend, is full of peril and hardship. Wherefore, I believe that it is wise to pay homage and to make offerings to several gods. Then, in the hour of battle, if one fail me another may aid and succour me. Behold, in Gades there are two great temples, one is known by the title of Melcarth-Hercules,¹ the other by the name Baal-Saturn. Peradventure thou hast heard of these and their wonders, for thou art a man of learning. Now within Melcarth-Hercules are the Pillars of Hercules;² these I worship for strength, while I worship Isis the mother because

¹ Melcarth from Malech=King. Cp. Malachi.

² "The first author who mentions them is Pindar, who places them at Gades (Cadiz), and his opinion had many followers in later times. . . ."—*Chambers' Encyclopædia*.

she giveth life and preserveth life, Mithras who is the god of the soldier and wardeth off the blows of the adversary, and Endovellicus the best of all, for he giveth health and thereby life and joy."

"Endovellicus hath not healed thy wound," murmured Paul.

"Yea, he hath failed me," sighed the soldier; "the pain afflicteth me night and day. I fear I have offended this powerful god."

"Nay, he cannot heal, because he is without power, being but the empty dream of man. Howbeit, my God can heal thee and free thee from the woe of this wound of thine."

"This pain," said the Gallæcian, "pierceth my loins as a sword. I sleep not in the night hours. I twist and turn and know that I am condemned by Endovellicus thus to suffer for a term of years. In my youth I made him no offering, mocking at him as a god of Lusitania. So now he will not hearken to my prayer, and I shall continue to be afflicted."

Then for answer Paul bade the soldier uncover that part of his body that did so prick and torment him. And the saint softly prayed. Naming Jesus the Christ three times he drew his hands over the loins and the back of this man. For a space his fingers strayed along the great bone which cometh from the neck and traverseth the back to the hinderparts. And the Holy Power that is of the Spirit worked out through the hands of Paul, so that swiftly was the Gallæcian eased; and the suffering, that sealed up his brows, now loosed them as all pain fled and gladness overspread his countenance. Until this hour he had walked as a cripple, leaning upon a staff. Now he rose up, cast it from him, and walking, leaping, he crossed the deck as lightly as any Grecian youth who is champion in the games. The sailors marvelled when they perceived the change in this man and learned of the miracle wrought through the hands of Paul. They gathered about him, asking questions concerning the healing, and he spoke, saying: "This man was not healed through the touch of my hands, but through the power of the one God and His Son, Jesus Christ. I am but the vessel through which He poured the grace of His healing."

And the saint then told in simple words tidings of Jesus the Christ. A great hush fell over those who hearkened and when, after an hour or more, Paul sought to make an end they prayed him to continue his discourse on the morrow.

However, the Gallæcian, alone among the passengers, asked that he might be baptized and become a servant of the "Lord

of Healing," as he called Christ. The other Gentiles, who journeyed to Gades, were noble Romans acquainted with the philosophies, and these twitted Paul until the saint had itching ears, and losing patience, cried out upon the darkness of their understanding. So Luke drew his master apart and away from these men who even cast doubt upon the healing of the soldier. And the physician bade Paul rest for a while. It was a sign that the saint was not yet whole when he could thus be roused to anger by the foolish mockery of wordmongers. But the Gallæcian followed Paul as a dog follows his master; and the two communed together while the ship sped over the shining seas and each hour drew them nearer their new enterprise.

"I will pay allegiance only to thy God in the coming days," said the soldier; "for truly he hath given me back my life and my joy. But I have little understanding of thy worship. Wherefore, when we are come to Gades I would present thee to a kinsman of mine who is veritably the wisest philosopher in all the world. He hath plumbed the depths and scaled the heights with his wisdom; and I would hear ye reason together, so that, as a skein of wool, the tidings of thy Lord may be unravelled for me."

And Paul inquired as to the name and state of this kinsman. Then the countenance of the soldier changed somewhat as he said, "It is needful that thou shouldst walk warily in communing with my kinsman. I wot not whether I should tell thee more concerning him, for he is powerful and is a man of many secrets who walketh apart. His name is Symphorus,¹ but he is one of a brotherhood and calleth himself to his chosen disciples, 'The Initiate of the Green Dragon.'"

Hearing this title Paul pressed the soldier with questions concerning his kinsman, for the saint knew that the Initiates of the Green Dragon were men who served within the Ancient Mystery, and they were in many ways evil and possessed great and secret power.

It was rumoured that these philosophers sought to set chains about the understanding of the young Cæsar, and through him, govern the Empire. This rumour might have been some idle fable, but it was borne to the ears of Paul by Aristobulus, a noble, when the saint lay in bonds at Rome. And now, though he was ignorant of the practices and lore locked within the ancient baleful mystery, he believed that he faced in it and in the master Symphorus the old adversary Satan.

¹ A Greek word meaning "expedient".

CHAPTER V

NOW the Gallæcian would not impart to Paul any further tidings concerning the Initiates of the Green Dragon. He only told the saint how, in his youth, Symphorus desired him to be one of these elect persons. For a time he was in a strait betwixt two, desiring to possess the powers of these masters, and yet greatly fearing them. For all swore the oath of obedience to the Ancient Mystery. And fear overcoming desire, the Gallæcian fled from Gades and sought service at Rome in the legions of Cæsar.

Howbeit, in these days upon the sea, Paul put great heart into him, and his dread of and reverence for the master Symphorus—the wizard of wizards—forsook him. Waxing strong in his faith in the Lord Jesus, this simple soldier designed with Paul the journeys he should make through Spain.

“Firstly thou shalt abide a space in Gades, then shalt thou journey to Astigi, Corduba and Emerita, and afterwards thou shalt go unto Malaca and Cartageno,¹ thus wilt thou span the province of Bætica, and canst then, in Cartageno, strike at the very heart of Tarraconensis² and so will the seed of thy noble words enrich the greater part of my country. Corduba of the temples is the source of its wisdom and Cartageno is known as the great mart for trade in flax and corn, in all manner of precious stones that delight the eye, in fish and the hunters’ meat, and in all that delighteth the belly. And behold, the people of Bætica call Gades ‘The Watchtower of the Sea’. For the seafarers of many nations journey to it, and the people of the port build great ships that ride the storm and sail to Britannia, to Gaul, and also to the far south. And the merchants of Gades trade with the ports in the east, in Adria, and also with the ports of Italy. Wherefore, if thou canst persuade certain of the sailors and the merchantmen of the truth of thy God, they will, peradventure, bear tidings of Him to every corner of the known earth. Veritably, friend Paul, thou wilt rejoice and be glad in

¹ Ecija, Cordova, Merida, Malaga, Cartagena.

² Roughly speaking, in those days Lusitania corresponded with Portugal, Bætica with southern Spain and Tarraconensis with the rest of Spain.

the province of Bætica. It hath been called 'The Garden of the Gods', and thou shalt change it into the Garden of Jesus Christ. This land is famed for its olives, dark fruit of the dawn, for its oranges, gold fruit of the sunset, for its fleeces which are sheared from the white flocks that wander over its hills. Many precious metals lie within the bowels of its earth. The Silver Mountains pour forth their treasure, the fields yield wheat and the springs give out healing. All the herbs of the fields flourish. Wherefore riches are heaped up in Gades; and if thou canst gain the ear of the Romans, who have great estates nigh to the port, thou wilt win for the service of Jesus gold in abundance, and mayest thus pay much honour to His Name."

"I seek not gold for Jesus," cried Paul, and he admonished the Gallæcian for this saying.

This simple soldier was somewhat perplexed, but took the rebuke in good part, saying, "Truly, thy God hath a strangeness I cannot fathom. For I have ever believed that a mighty one delighteth in splendour and in rich offerings. Howsoever, because thy God hath rendered me the greatest gift of all—my health and my joy—I am prepared only to serve and worship Him."

And here these two ceased from speech, for the coast of Hispania appeared upon the rim of the sea. It seemed to Paul, as he gazed eagerly towards the quarter where lay Gades, that he was journeying as the children of Israel once journeyed to a Promised Land. So the Lord would deliver this great country into His servant's hand. And the saint believed that here, among the Gentiles, he would at last find freedom from the persecution of Pharisees and Sadducees. It was veritably the Garden of God; inasmuch as he would not meet with base envy, lying fables, and plots against his life in that land. Wherefore, he bowed himself down, giving thanks for the peaceful days of labour that he trusted would be his in Bætica, which is the crown of Hispania.

CHAPTER VI

THE Saint of Tarsus gave no thought to that dark sentence, "Be sure thine enemy will find thee out," when he set foot upon the earth of Gades. He reckoned not that the hunter was upon his heels, that the hawk had sighted its prey from the far skies.

Certain youths in Jerusalem¹ had vowed, when Paul was last in that city, that they would neither eat nor drink until they had slain him, but a guard of Roman soldiers delivered him out of their hands. So these zealous youths, not being minded to die of hunger, were compelled to break their oath. Like most Zealots they never forgot an offence. They watched for the time when Paul would either perish in prison or be loosed from his bonds. And for this purpose certain young men in Rome watched the comings and goings of the brethren.

But so speedily did the saint depart to Puteoli he escaped their vigilance, and his ship had set sail when certain among them came to that town seeking him. Now amongst these youths was a son of Alexander, a Jew of Ephesus, who had plagued Paul much in past times. This son bore the name of his father, so he shall be called by the title the saints set upon him in a later season, namely, "Bildad, son of Contention." Being crafty and upright in his observances of the Law of Moses, he was held in esteem by the High Priest in Jerusalem, who bade him keep a watch on Paul and, if he were loosed, deal with him as he would with an outcast from Israel.

In company with other servants of the High Priest, Bildad sailed in a ship that followed swiftly in the wake of the barque that bore the little company of the saints to the province of Bætica. But winds buffeted their ship, and Paul was three weeks established in Gades before his bitter enemy disembarked there.

Now Paul had no friends in Gades, so he first abode at the Inn of the Hebrews, which was called by the Gentiles, "The House of the Unripe Figs", because the Jews were held by them to be a bitter and proud people, holding off from all other nations. Wherefore the natives of the town were astonished by the

¹ Acts xxiii. 12.

sweetness of Paul's speech, by his compassion for the sick and ailing, and they hearkened to his words.

He bore letters to certain wealthy Romans who lived in palaces upon the coast, and he visited them, for it was ever his design in a strange town to seek all manner of people, moulding his sentences according to their understanding. These Romans were the spoiled ones of the earth. They hearkened courteously to the saint when he declared his purpose in Gades. But they lightly mocked at his gospel, and blinded by their power and wealth they could not garner the rich harvest of truth which Paul, Aristarchus and Luke offered to them.

Perceiving their stubbornness, the saint did not waste further speech or prayer upon them, but went among the simple and ignorant folk. He preached to the fishermen and to the slaves who sought for nuggets and seeds of gold in the springs and streams among the sands of Bætica. And these hearkened with joy to the promise of a God who set the first last and the last first. And Paul went to the yards where the men built the famed ships of Gades, and also among these builders he found a following. Speedily the brethren shaped a church, and they rejoiced because their work prospered, and in scarce any city had they so speedily won the hearts of the poor and simple folk.

Luke healed many with his herbs and his counsel, and thus cut a way to their understanding; then Paul's fervent discourses caused them to promise allegiance to Christ. Wherefore there came an hour when Andronicus cried to the saint, "Master, thou wilt wipe the province of Bætica as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. Thou wilt cleanse this people and set them apart for God." And letters were sent to Rome, telling the brethren the glad tidings and demanding that others should journey to Gades to take up the work in the time Paul must needs depart to visit the inland cities. These letters were scarcely dispatched when Bildad landed in Gades and went into the House of the Unripe Figs, where he spoke with the innkeeper and declared such scandal to him he straightway sought out Paul and bade the saint depart and seek other lodgment.

Now Bildad would not slay Paul, for this would be the sin of blood, so he determined to overthrow the saint by setting the Gentiles against him.

This son of contention went busily to and fro, whispering baleful sentences in the ears of the citizens. He told of Paul's imprisonment in Rome and showed merchants and the servers

and priests in the temple a parchment called the "Declaration of Demetrius".¹ This writing was signed by the elders of the Craftsmen's Guild in Ephesus. It claimed that Paul was a servant of the evil powers, and that he sought to overthrow the worship of the gods, having in Ephesus striven to ruin the honest artificers, robbing them of their commerce in the little images of Diana.

The name of Paul was passed from one to another in Gades, and when traders and other heathens cast dark looks at the saint the people he taught began to fall away from him. But Bildad worked so secretly the brethren had no understanding of this change, and wot not that once more their master was in peril of imprisonment, stoning or death.

¹ Acts xix. 24.

CHAPTER VII

IN this season the Gallæcian presented Paul to Symphorus, and the saint soon perceived that the soldier had not boasted in declaring the wisdom of this master of knowledge. He showed it in abundance, reasoning as a dialectician, speaking of the doctrine of the Stoics and the Epicureans, and disclosing the weaknesses of each philosophy. But he did not impart any of his own beliefs to the saint, choosing rather to cause him to declare his own faith and wisdom.

Paul was well pleased. This man did not mock as did so many learned Romans when the Resurrection of Christ was recounted. He said, "Yea, master, I can well believe that Jesus could wake His body from the sleep of death and walk forth among men. Nay, more, I am not ignorant of the strange life and miracles performed by this Son of Man. In the East I hearkened to thee, and at Ephesus to the sayings of thy brethren. Verily, I believe in the story of thy Christ; I believe in thy vision on the road to Damascus, and I know that this vision will change kingdoms and shape the destiny of future generations."

And the saint's heart leaped for joy, believing that he had converted this learned heathen. Yet there was still uneasiness in his soul; a voice whispered, "Be wary, Paul; hold back thy speech." So he did not continue his discourse, but questioned Symphorus, asking him to declare his own inner faith.

There came a swift answer, "I am not as the Epicureans or the Stoics. I am a believer, not a shatterer of belief. I serve an older faith than thine; I render homage to the principle of a God-Creator. But the one I worship thou canst not revere or understand. Paul, great master though thou art, there is a gulf fixed between us which may not be bridged. I love the temper, the swiftness of thy understanding, but I hold not with many of thy teachings. In this respect we are adversaries. For thou servest but a half truth, while I serve the whole. The darkness of the other side of the moon dimmeth and confuseth thine imagination. We are spiritual enemies, and will abide in enmity unless I can persuade thee, in mine own time and season, of thy many errors."

Now the saint had spoken with much eloquence, the salt of wisdom being contained in his pleadings with this man. Wherefore he was silenced for a space, while he sought to examine his companion's meaning. Soon his inner sight pierced this man's mind; and he spoke courteously, saying, "I am no man's enemy. I seek to obey the command of my Master, Jesus, to love those who call themselves my adversaries. I perceive that thou mockest at such a strange sentence; but I declare what is true. Howsoever, because thou art like unto the knowledge-mongers of Athens I will not waste my life by passing even one more hour in thy company. Others have sore need of me. I pray that we may not meet again."

Symphorus bowed graciously, saying, "Nay, it is written in the scroll of the stars that we are to have a notable encounter. I shall watch patiently for that time."

CHAPTER VIII

NOW, one of the rulers of the city of Gades was named Syntrophus, and he had begotten many sons. The youngest, Sabinus, was well-favoured in stature and in strength. The people hailed him as a champion; for he excelled in spear-throwing and in all the games that delighted the Romans. He worshipped in the Temple of Melcarth-Hercules and believed that he owed his strength to the power given out by the two bronze pillars that are set up within it. Wherefore, as it was known that he was very jealous for the honour of his god, Bildad persuaded an elder-priest, who served at the great altar, to show Sabinus the "Declaration of Demetrius".

Sabinus became very wroth on learning that the Jew named in this writing had come to Gades with intent to overthrow the Pillars of Hercules, and he sought the saint throughout the city, meaning to cast him forth or to demand of him worship and offerings for his god as a sign of peace and goodwill.

For a space Paul and Sabinus did not encounter one another as the saint lived in the mean quarters of the town, going among the builders of ships, holding speech with them. The believers increased in numbers and the little church prospered. But Andronicus learned from the innkeeper who kept the House of the Hebrews that certain of those who had been baptized had not cast off their old beliefs, inasmuch as they still went in unto the temple of Melcarth-Hercules to worship. He told Paul of this backsliding, and that, on the morrow, the Festival of Spring would be celebrated, and the men of Gades would assemble therein.

Now all these sayings had been put in the mouth of Andronicus by the guileful innkeeper, who served Bildad. And the saint, being weary from his many labours, was not watchful. He fell into the snares set by this emissary of the Pharisees and sought out a place of vantage no great distance from the temple doors.

And behold, the white-robed worshippers came forth in numbers, singing the hymn of rebirth, playing upon the flute

and the viol, crying out their praise of idols, leaping and dancing in the sunlight.

Perceiving certain of the newly won brethren among them, Paul stood up on a high stone and raised his hand, calling to them. Speedily the people gathered about him, for the citizens of Bætica are of a curious mind; and for a short while the babble of tongues was hushed as they hearkened to the speech of the stranger.

Clad in white linen and crowned with a laurel, Sabinus passed by that way in company with his fellows who acclaimed him, crying out, "Make way, make way for the Pride of Hercules; make way for the mighty spear-thrower." And the multitude fell back, murmuring words of praise and honour. But Paul paid no heed, remaining upon the stone that stood in the path of the wrestler.

Seeing him, Sabinus halted, saying, "Who is this babbler? Who is this ill-formed hunchback? Why is he suffered to speak at the door of the temple?"

One answered him, saying, "It is Paul, the stranger who bids us worship only his God, who is greedy for the honour of one named Jesus."

"Behold the man I seek," said Sabinus; "give way, I would speak with him."

And the people pressed behind. But a little space was rounded off, so that the giant and the "small, crooked ancient" stood alone. By this title was the saint known among the heathen in Gades.

As these two faced each other murmurings ceased, all watched silently, deeming that the champion would bait and make a sport of this Hebrew.

Sabinus spoke, saying, "I am told that thou art the enemy of my gods. Thou declarest the rule of thy God, and that He will destroy the temple and all I worship."

Paul was not in any manner daunted by the fierce mien of this Gallæcian Goliath and made answer, "Friend, those sayings of thine are not mine. I seek not destruction in the name of my God. I seek but to spread tidings of Him, for He is the truth and the life. He hath raised thee up in the pride of thy strength, and He can, if it pleaseth Him, cast thee down into the dust again."

And Sabinus laughed at these words, saying, "It is plain thou art an ignorant fellow; but thou shalt not escape through any sleight of tongue. Come with me now, and in the presence

of the people make an offering in the temple, pay obeisance and homage to the Pillars of Hercules. Then shall we know that thou art a true man and no treason-monger."

"Nay, I will not go with thee into the Temple of Melcarth-Hercules, nor into any temple in this town."

At these words the crowd made a hiss like geese, and would have cried out upon Paul if Sabinus had not stayed them with a movement of his hand. "Then thou art a blasphemer," declared the wrestler; "and by the red oaks of Emerita we will cast thee into the sea for this offence." And he would have spoken further, but the saint thrust in upon his speech with swift words that rang like the clash of spears, sounding plainly in the hearing of all that assembly.

"I am a Roman citizen and pay due allegiance to Cæsar. Thou dardest not lay a hand upon me else is the law offended and Rome dishonoured by the Bæticans. Howsoever, men of Gades, I am come with goodwill to your land, to bear you tidings of the truth. Now, it is my faith and my belief that God dwelleth not in gold, silver, or bronze, or in any image shaped by art or man's device."

Great was the uproar at these words, and Sabinus cried to the people, "Behold, he testifieth against himself, he hath spoken blasphemy, polluted our noble temple while standing at its very doors. Come, let us stone him."

In this hour, death, the deliverer, seemed near to Paul. But even as Sabinus advanced upon him Symphorus and his servants came between, thrusting back the giant. And he said, "Be wary, most noble champion. I know this Paul of Tarsus to be a Roman citizen who carrieth weight in the court of Rome. So it is needful that thou shouldst give him a hearing and declare thine own accusation before the justice in our city."

"I will declare it now before the people," cried the young man, and he drew from his tunic the parchment which contained the Declaration of Demetrius. This he gave forth to the people, ending it with the saying, "Citizens of Gades, ye see how this brawler sought to overthrow great Diana of the Ephesians. And from his own speech it is plain that he is here in our town to work the same mischief. If it were possible he would destroy the Temple of Melcarth-Hercules and of Baal-Saturn. This fellow is an emissary of the demons who are hid in the hills. He beareth only evil, desiring to rouse the wrath of the gods against us by openly blaspheming, by seeking to pollute and befoul their magnificence."

And the people again cried out upon Paul. But Symphorus silenced them, for the Bæticans respected him because he was of an ancient family, one that had raised up altars to poetry, music, poverty and love of country in the Temple of Melcarth-Hercules. Thus it came to pass that through the courteous defence of this declared adversary Paul was suffered to speak once more to the people.

"Citizens of Gades," he cried. "Ye are all acquainted with the name of Gallio, who was born in the noble city of Corduba, and is by reason of his wisdom and his works the glory of Hispania. Behold, when I was in Corinth I appeared before this deputy of Cæsar's and set forth my case. He silenced my accusers, giving me full leave to serve God, to preach His wisdom and gather together His people. For this purpose alone am I come to Gades. Those whom ye worship are not my affair. No man in this town can prove that I have, in any way, profaned your temple or, in any manner, dishonoured your city or your gods."

And now the saint's further speech was lost as Sabinus, in a voice like the bellowing of a bull, called to the mind of the people Paul's saying that God did not dwell in gold, silver or bronze. Wherefore they shouted and made turmoil, some flinging stones. Perceiving the multitude were with him, the champion called on certain youths to aid him in breaking through the fence the servants of Symphorus had made about Paul. But these drew knives from beneath their tunics, and the Bæticans fell back fearfully. So Sabinus set upon them alone, and he was cast to the earth. Then, shaping themselves into a wedge, these guards broke through the crowd, several citizens being wounded or crushed by the feet of the frenzied people.

It might have gone ill with the saint and this little company if the tidings had not been borne to the mob that the city's guards were coming that way, and that they were strengthened by the soldiers of Cæsar. So, swift as the breath of Euroclydon was the dispersal of that wrathful gathering of the people. Only certain youths, followers of Sabinus, remained and made an assault. But these were thrust back as a chariot halted near Symphorus, and he caused a bleeding and wearied Paul to be laid in it. Then seizing the reins, he drove through the streets, with voice and whip conjuring the swift Asturian horses to hasten on their road.

CHAPTER IX

MANY fables concerning the uproar were recounted in Gades. The Bæticans delighted in building on another's words; for they were a people easily moved by any happening. It was declared that Paul, a great and evil magician, had come out of the east with intent to blast the people of Gades and turn the gods against them. But Sabinus, the son of the ruler, was not fearful, nor would he yield to his spells. So the two gave battle, and the stones ran with the blood of the people. As ever, the champion was victorious, and the powerful wizard had fled from the town.

The Roman deputy did not hold with this fable. For being an Epicurean he believed not in wizards or magicians. But he made enquiry about Paul, and learned that he abode for two years in prison at Rome. Wherefore, it was well that Symphorus had served as a good friend and bore Paul northward in his swift chariot through the pleasant land of Bætica.

Once assured that they were not pursued, Symphorus caused his chariot to halt. Leaping from it, he commanded his slave to draw water from a spring; and with his own hands this Bætican noble bathed and bound Paul's hurts. Then they drove softly forward, resting in a village when the fiery breath of the sun scorched the earth at noon. In that time Paul slept and rose refreshed, a new man. And he questioned his saviour, saying, "Why, sir, when thou hast declared thine enmity to me, dost thou so courteously use me? What strange charity of heart hath caused thee to deliver me out of the hands of my tormentors and preserve my life?"

"Because, master, I would enter upon another warfare with thee, because I would engage in combat that dexterous understanding of thine—swift as the throw of a Gallæcian spear, sharp as a Lusitanian arrow."

"I am not as the philosophers who play with words, casting them at each other as children fling pebbles in sport," said Paul; "but I am verily beholden to thee, for thou art filled with the charity of a noble mind and seekest not to return burning for

burning, stripe for stripe—though I do vow that I am prepared to meet thee as a friend and brother.”

“Nay, Paul, that may not be; for I serve a more ancient master than your master. I serve a faith born out of chaos, shaped before the beginning of time. And because I have the power of foreknowledge I have perceived that thy vision will, for an age, prevail with this world of ours. So I would acquaint thee of my own finer, rarer vision, my golden dream, which alone can bear to earth that Kingdom of Heaven thou dost name so oft when communing with the people of Bætica.”

“And what now is thy purpose concerning me?” enquired the saint.

“I seek to keep thee out of the prison that awaiteth thee in Gades,” Symphorus made answer. “We journey to a sure and safe hold among the mountains; and there thou shalt abide until such time as the wrath of my countrymen hath abated, and thou canst labour again for thy God in Gades.”

“My time is short,” cried Paul. “I am much beholden to thee, but I may not tarry in idleness among the hills.”

“Nay, thou wilt not be idle. For there, in the loneliness, I will discover to thine understanding some fragment of the Ancient Mystery—not all; for thou art but a babe in knowledge and thy body is not framed to endure the hardships which are borne by the initiates of the Green Dragon.”

“I will not take part in any Mystery,” declared Paul. “I have come upon several of them in Asia and in Greece. I know them to be either folly or a vain search after truth. For the seekers’ feet are set upon a crooked road.”

“I would not have thee pollute the rites of the Ancient Mystery by sharing in them,” said Symphorus. “I would only manifest my power, declare my doctrine, causing thee to look upon the tapestry of time and perceive the signs of the years, the endless change, the rise and fall of the tides of life and death. And when I have made an end of my showing I will sit at thy feet and hearken to thy words.”

Thanking this master, Paul fell into silence. All about them lay a sunlit region, green and gold. It was in the early spring, and the world rejoiced. Many coloured blossoms hid the earth, and the ceaseless song of birds rose from the heart of wooded ways traversed by the chariot. They passed but one night upon the road, and towards noon on the morrow drew near to their journey’s end.

Behind the travellers stretched a wide yellow plain. Before

them rose dark, dead mountains, upon whose higher slopes no trees or plants grew, no life flourished: a stillness reigned over those barren ways. Verily, this land resembled some lost earth conquered by an invisible evil which drove from its face the husbandman with his plough and his sickle, with his olive groves and his vines. Paul was very weary, when, having passed through a stony valley, they came at last to the dwelling of Symphorus, which stood in a niche in the hills, a small dwelling grey as the rock about it, set in a desolation.

No comely sheep wandered over those hills. No wild beast roved, no bird cried. All about the travellers reigned a silence unearthly, fearful as the loneliness in the deeps of Hell.

Now Paul's mind was at rest because he learned that the servants of Symphorus had borne tidings of him to Luke, and also he had dispatched a letter to him by a sure hand. But in this desert place disquiet filled the saint once more, and at dawn he prayed earnestly that strength should be given him for his encounter with the baleful priest of the Ancient Mystery. On that day they would enter within its gates; and the saint was aware of a strange power wielded by Symphorus which could cloud for a space his understanding; then would he bewilder his guest with subtleties of words.

The silence had passed with the sunrise. A great wind strode the mountains and hunted through the deep, narrow valleys, snarling and whining like some beast of prey.

"The hour is propitious," said Symphorus, as he greeted Paul. "Come with me now into the cave of the initiates, and thou shalt learn of my dream."

CHAPTER X

PAUL and Symphorus traversed the caves that bent this way and that, were dim and confined. So, for an instant, the saint was blinded when he entered a vast hall illumined by many torches wherein minstrels played soft music. These, at the command of their master, withdrew into the depths of that lofty chamber which was veritably a temple within the heart of the mountain. But the murmuring of their instruments continued as the saint hearkened to the words of the initiate.

"Thou hast declared to me, Paul, the three excellent gifts which are the signs of thy belief and the virtues of all who would veritably serve thy God."

"Yea, faith, hope and charity," said Paul; "these are the stones of our foundation."

"They are but sandstone then," declared Symphorus; "and will melt away with the passage of the years. Know, most learned master, that life and time move in cycles. Each cycle contains three ages. First is there the pure and lovely blossom of spring, and after it the opened flower, rich in the pride and glory of its summer. Lastly comes the drooping and withering, corruption and decay. Within all the beliefs of man there are ever these seeds of death. And though thine is a lovely vision, Paul, it will but live for a cycle of time, starting in the beauty of the blossom, bearing nobility and the good with its perfumed flower, then changing into what is but an ugly evil in that last season. It must perish because faith, hope and charity are not enough. All these virtues will fail if wisdom be not added to them. My worship containeth faith, joy, delight in power, and lastly, infinite wisdom. Wherefore, only through it shall all men finally be saved."

Now Paul began in eager, vehement speech to reason with his host. But he prayed him to be silent. "Permit me first to show to thee the tapestry of time. It will appear in strange images, and thou wilt have small understanding of them. But afterwards I will interpret all the figures and shapes that are made manifest in this Chronicle of the Years; and I will also open the book

of my wisdom, so that thou wilt know Alpha and, peradventure, Omega."

Paul declared that he was prepared to follow Symphorus through the Chronicle of the Years, and promised to be without fear. For the initiate told him that he would look upon baleful images that might cause him to turn back, fleeing from the night into which they must enter, and wherein they would dwell for a time and time again. Then this strange man took Paul's two hands within his and held them, while one by one the torches were quenched by the slaves, while the melancholy murmuring of the distant music fell softer and softer upon the hearing, and was gathered into a hush and a night that blotted out the rich adornments of that temple, and all the company that were in it.

And then it seemed to Paul that he stood in a void, that his body did not rest upon the earth. He was sensible only of the touch of the other's hands. In a little while there came a break in that overwhelming darkness. A light like the first greyness of dawn enabled the Saint of Tarsus to perceive that he stood upon a rock on a high mountain. And slowly, far beneath him, came from out the greyness the shapes of mighty cities, wide pastures, forests, turbulent seas. And Paul knew them and knew them not as familiar places. For all had a strangeness which he could not comprehend. His soul was swept within the embrace of a desolate loneliness; and almost he felt glad because he perceived still beside him the figure of the seer in his robes.

Then the darkness lifted and a radiance, a glory spread over all those lands, lighting up for Paul the faces of uncountable multitudes of men. He was near to them, and yet far from them, perceiving the earth, and at the same time, perceiving each of these myriad shapes, and their labours, their busy comings and goings.

Howbeit, his eye was caught again by the wonder of that radiance in the heavens; and soon he perceived a woman who seemed to be the giver of it. She stood upon the winds and hung above the earth, and her golden robe lit up with its rays the arched skies, the land and the spreading waters. Gazing more closely, the watcher perceived that she did not, as he had at first believed, rest upon the air. A star bore her upwards and onwards. And all the men who, like little insects, crawled to and fro upon the earth lifted up their faces in worship and gave thanks to this sky-woman for her golden rays.

Time passed; the moulding words of birth¹ were uttered; and Symphorus murmured, "Paul, look again."

There came from the underworld a dragon, red in colour, mighty in girth. He rose up above the earth, hastening towards the wonder-woman. And Paul perceived that upon her brows was set a crown within which were twelve precious stones that shone as the stars. And their lights were dimmed by the breath of the red dragon; and as he journeyed up the sky he was frightful to look upon, for he had seven crowned heads and ten horns. And again Symphorus whispered, "Count them, Paul. Verily, these are the evils which beset the soul of man, giving him no peace."

The woman was with child, and cried her woe, praying for deliverance.

And the dragon came upon her, and sought to devour the child she brought forth. But swiftly the face of the heavens changed. The sky became as a silver net and it enveloped the child and angels gathered about him and bore him away from the sight of men. The dragon pursued them and there was war in the heavens, and Paul saw that the angels fought not with the weapons of men, but with the flail of the tempest and with thunder and lightning, and they confused and bewildered the dragon, casting him down to the earth. Even as he fell he clove in pieces certain of the shining balls of light that dwell in the firmament, and others were dragged by the tail of the mighty beast from their high place and were scattered. But the son of the wonder-woman was preserved.

Once more the dragon pursued her, and she fled to and fro upon the earth. Then, from the mouth of this beast there poured a sea as wide and deep as Adria. But the ground swallowed up these turbulent waters, and the great angel descended from the heavens and gave to the woman the wings of a bird wherewith she might fly from her persecutor.

And now it seemed to the Saint of Tarsus that he was lifted up and borne with Symphorus across the earth. They floated over mountains, lakes and islands, over vast plains. At last they came upon a wilderness which is beyond the confines of the world. And the woman abode in that place in safety. For the dragon was bound to the earth. Wherefore he persecuted the wise and

¹ "The words spoken when there was chaos. They caused all that is visible to appear. Those words drew the earth out of the void and created all living things that move upon the face of the ground and the face of the waters. Those words unlocked the gates of life and signify continual creation."

the good who came and went upon it. Then he summoned another beast out of the sea, one who had horns also and the seven heads of evil. Upon each one of these was graven the word "Blasphemy." And the dragon gave this beast authority over men. It was in the likeness of a leopard, but its feet were the feet of a bear, and its mouth that of a devouring lion.

Now the good and the true strove valiantly with the old dragon and dealt its seventh head a deadly wound. So he sought shelter within the mountain, and, finding none, descended into the deeps of the sea.

And all this while Symphorus and Paul followed him, and were at ease in each element. They journeyed among the rocks and caves that are hidden in the watery ways. They set their feet upon many-coloured shells and gazed on the myriad fishes that drift above the floor of the seas.

The red dragon lay there moaning and crying because of his deadly wound. But the beast he had summoned now crushed the good and the true with his bear's feet and devoured the brave and the noble with his lion's mouth. Wherefore, all that lived were conquered and paid homage to this creature who bore the name of "Blasphemy" upon his crowned heads.

And the dragon came once more from his shelter and bade men serve this monster brought forth by him. And anguish, cruelty and bitterness were the portion of the nations. In a little while yet another beast rose out of the bowels of the earth; and he had the two horns of a goat, but he spoke as the dragon. Graven upon his horns were the words "Knowledge of Evil." And behold, through this knowledge, he healed the dragon's wounded head and loosened those chains that held him to the earth.

Many were the wonders wrought by this fearful monster. He made fire his slave and the slave of men, so that they worked all manner of marvels with it; and they were filled with the wickedness of the power bestowed upon them, and sought but to hurt and wound all that lived and breathed upon the face of the ground. Yet not all men were with them. A remnant remained faithful and would not recognize the authority of this beast or of his ancient father the dragon. So these were pursued and tormented by those who worked miracles with fire, who bore the mark of the beast upon their foreheads.

And Symphorus whispered, "Paul, this is the third desolation in the Chronicle of the Years. Count their woes and bear them in remembrance."

Then, for a space, the mists gathered about the places men inhabit, and about the mighty images of the dragon which they had set up in each city at the bidding of the horned beast. Once more the watchers rested in airy ways with neither the ground at their feet nor the waters about them, with neither sun nor moon nor stars to lighten the gloom. And behold, dread and weariness overcame the saint, and he cried, "Enough, Symphorus, I pray thee draw me out of this broth of abominable wickedness, out of this Hell, else shall I fail and perish."

"Nay, there is more to come," murmured the seer. "Brother, look again."

And now these two watchers were as the eagles and had the power of their wings, flying above mountains, seas and plains, traversing worlds, coming at last to the great desert.

Again Paul perceived the wonder-woman and rejoiced in the rays cast forth by her golden robe. But soon peace passed from that wilderness, radiance was dulled and soiled by a mighty presence of evil. For a time it was invisible. There came a perfume like the incense in the temples; it filled all that desert with its pleasant odours. And it was in the semblance of red clouds that gathered swiftly about the sky-woman, enveloping her.

Once more Paul perceived the red dragon and knew that these clouds were belched from his hissing mouth. The face of this monster had changed and was in the semblance of a serpent as he came guilefully upon the woman, coiling about her, and all the time giving forth this red incense which darkened her robes, changing them into a purple hue.

And the dragon summoned the horned beast and set his captive upon it. Then again were the two watchers borne back to earth. Now the sky-woman reigned no more in glory in the heavens, giving joy and delight to men. She was throned upon the red dragon, and her purple robe poured out scarlet rays of wrath that stirred up anger, jealousy and fear in all the seed of Adam. So they made war upon one another, and worshipped this changed woman who bestowed on them cruelty, power and lust. Upon her brows were graven "Mystery. The Mother of Harlots." She was adorned with precious stones that were not like the pure diadem of twelve stars which had been cast away. These stones were in many baleful and fierce colours and gave out the malice and venom of the serpent, filling men's hearts with the wrath of destruction. And they tormented one another as never before. All manner of pollutions were practised and goodness or truth were not found in any city.

But a remnant of the good and the true bore witness against this frightfulness. They were fugitives who had been betrayed, and they sought the caves in the desolate places, hiding themselves away from the great evil. Though all joy had perished for them they still possessed hope and clung to it, waiting and believing in the salvation that was surely coming.

"Now thou knowest the last woe," murmured Symphorus. "Almost is the Chronicle of the Years ended. Watch for that end."

Soon the mighty arch of heaven broke in two halves and there came from between them the son of the wonder-woman. He rode in triumph upon a winged white horse bearing in his quiver the arrows of light, in his hand the spear of wisdom, and girt to his golden thigh the sword of justice. The heavens closed behind him; for an instant, stillness reigned. "Truth" was writ upon his brows in letters of pure flame. And Paul hid his face because he could not bear the terrible light of their fire. He wept, but there was no bitterness in his tears, nor was there aught but awe, joy and love in his heart.

This shape of splendour descended from the dark blue skies, seeking for the beast and the dragon which ruled the earth. And he smote with his arrows the word "Blasphemy" that was written upon the seven heads of the monster and he clove in two the beast with his sword. The earth shook at his presence, men fleeing to and fro in dread. For from the perishing beast there came a plague of locusts that sought to devour all those who bore the brand of the dragon. These had the hair of women and the teeth of lions, and they slew a third part of the sons of men.

The winged white horse trampled upon these venomous stinging creatures, destroying them. Then did the son of the woman pursue, even into the bottomless pit, the monster who had tormented his mother; and there he chained up the adversary, binding him to the rock of damnation.

Great was that overthrowing. The struggle and the roaring of the beast caused the land to be cracked in divers places, stones were flung upwards towards the skies; and the mountains were riven or moved to another place.

Paul and Symphorus were shaken and wholly spent by this rending and tearing of all creation. They were gathered into themselves, their tongues locked, hearing and sight sealed, remembrance blotted out, their understanding holden.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN Paul came from out the swaddling bands of a deep sleep the earth lay smothered in dusk, the fate of men hidden from his sight. But there rose from it a wailing like the desolate cries of birds, and he knew that pain was not yet ended.

The seer murmured, "Paul, I snatched thee away and caused remembrance to wither within thee, for thou couldst not bear any more. Verily, I have shown thee only certain of the signs that mark the Chronicle of the Years. Thou didst not perceive the beings of the great dark who bore, at the coming of the king, the seven vials of the wrath of life. They poured them out upon the men who worshipped the beast, forasmuch as the majesty of life was offended by the service they rendered to evil. And the first vial caused sores to break out upon the bodies of the multitude; the second burned, scorching up many. The third bore drought and the curse of the barren; and the fourth poured out blood that changed the sea into a place of death wherein life no more abode. But I will not tell thee more, inasmuch as the woes of the race of men in this vision are now ending; and they will triumph even over these seven evils of the soul."

"But this crying from earth breaketh my heart," said Paul; "Oh, master of evil, bear me hence. It is enough."

And the seer made answer, "Through conflict man is being reborn in a new and lovelier body. This woeful lamentation cometh out of the agony of rebirth. Watch, Paul, behold the end; and after that the beginning. For all things meet, and the end is fulfilment."

Now, for a time, the two abode in silent thought, Paul waiting in awe, fear and pain. Swiftly all was changed; the dusk passed as light came, and a still green sky hung above the earth.

Out of this vasty deep there crept and coiled a green dragon, splendid in raiment, glorious in the sight of men. He swam to and fro among the leaping stars; he spanned the whole arch of the heavens, swept back and forth in exultation; and his

cleansing breath wiped away the soil and hurt from the world, healing the race of man which had been smitten unto death.

The seer whispered, "Come with me, come home to earth."

Then Paul drew near to the multitude who dwelled within its borders; and he perceived a new Adam, one clad in beauty, robed in the power of a marvellous body. In shape it was the same as that in which he had been first fashioned. But now it no longer tormented, no longer burned up his soul. On his brow was written the word "Peace"; from his eyes shone the glimmer of dawning wisdom, and joy reigned in all the four quarters of the world. People laboured as of old, sought pleasure as in the elder-days; but anger, greed and jealousy had fled; so was the world a paradise.

Now from out the underworld sprang the king of heaven; and with the spear of wisdom he pricked the woman who wore the purple robes. And these fell away, and she was changed as men were changed.

Then the Beings of Light shouted for joy; and the king led the wonder-woman to her throne in the high heavens. Her golden robes gave forth glory that refreshed all creation, and her son's silver spear guarded its deep peace. These two, the mother and the son, reigned, and no beast disputed their kingdom. Before them all men bowed down in worship.

"And thus shall the Chronicle of the Years be ended," murmured Symphorus; "behold the kingdom of heaven is graven upon the face of the earth."

"Nay," cried Paul; "this chronicle is a lie; these things may not be. Thou hast cast about my understanding a trance of falsehood, a pagan deceit. Thou seekest to bind my soul to thee through the power of an evil dream."

"Be silent," cried the seer, "and look for an instant upon Alpha before I interpret the signs woven into this tapestry of time."

Then it seemed to the Saint of Tarsus that he was falling from a great height, yet he was without fear. For a great while he descended, passing through many strange places which he might not perceive by reason of the swiftness of that flight. And he gazed upon the earth once more and perceived men in the elder state of being. They were content, but as children playing in a garden. They were lovely as the first buds of spring, but in their faces there was neither the knowledge of pain, wonder, nor great joy. Only innocence and this pure content abode within their hearts.

The sky-woman watched over them, nourishing them with the light from her golden robe. And these men and women of the beginning of days danced, sang, and made merry.

"But wisdom is not. There abideth only the emptiness of innocence," murmured the seer as he cast the hood of dream about his companion, drawing him away from the vision of that first paradise.

CHAPTER XII

PAUL discovered himself in the mountain cavern, and he perceived vapours like curtains parting and then vanishing. Once more there came to his hearing the murmuring of stringed instruments; and Symphorus drew near to him, and beckoning, said, "Come with me, Paul."

They went into a small chamber hewn out of the grey rock. There they rested while Symphorus spoke of the visions and interpreted their many journeyings.

"I shall now call thee brother, Paul; for thou hast dwelled with me in the shadow and the light of the greater day. Thou hast joined in one of the practices of the Ancient Mystery. Wherefore, all shall be made clear as in a glass to thine understanding."

And the saint cried out upon him, saying, "Thou hast sought to shame me and to betray my God. Thou art a servant of the Prince of the Air."

"Nay," said the seer sadly. "No power in heaven or earth can compel thee to betray thy God. He hath thee in a sure hold. Now hearken to my gospel; and after I have spoken thou mayest declare thine own, and, peradventure, thou wilt ensnare me in thy net."

And with this answer Paul was well content.

"First I will interpret the little image, that last vision on which thou didst gaze. In the beginning of time the earth was a pleasant place in which to abide. It knew neither death nor birth as men know them now. In that age the wonder-woman nourished all living things with her rays. They suffered neither from hunger nor thirst. The radiance given out by this sun-goddess preserved and maintained life; so, when the hour of death sounded for man, beast, or bird, their bodies were in no way corrupted or decayed. They but passed into a kindly sleep, and pain was not theirs in that passing. And behold, the green dragon, that coileth and uncoileth among the stars, did drink up their bodies so that they seemed but to vanish into the air. And when a man was born the woman was not in travail or torn by

any anguish. She bore the child with joy, and the people sang the hymn of birth, exulting in the new life given to them.

"Now the earth was called the Garden of Innocents, inasmuch as wisdom was not found in it. Men and women were content, for they were not acquainted with sorrow, pain or fierce desire; to them ecstasy and great joy were strangers also. They knew naught of the wonder of change, the wonder of fear. Verily, they were innocents, for whom time was not, as time is known and marked and numbered by pain and lofty joy, by woe and ecstasy, by the fierce spring of the green or the red dragon within each man. So this golden age might not continue to everlasting. It was condemned by reason of its own emptiness, and it was swept away.

"Wherefore, Paul, think of Alpha as the Garden of Innocents in which abode neither wisdom nor knowledge, neither destruction nor true creation.

"I may not now speak of the blotting out of that beginning. There followed ages in which the face of the earth was changed, and the texture of man's body became gross. It was a world wherein he wandered without wit or understanding, in which life devoured life, wherein was torment, and also joy after pain. I will speak of the age in which the Ancient Mystery was first conceived. In that forgotten time many tribes held the sweet pastures of the earth and divided between them mountains, forests, rivers and lakes. And they worshipped the sky-woman, hailing her as the sun-goddess and the queen of heaven. They worshipped also her son. Verily this ancient people held in highest honour son and mother, for they were promise and fulfilment, the son being known by the name of the mother, for she was the life-bearer; and her image was graven upon him. The father was life-bringer, and he guarded these twain. In that time we worshipped not one God, but a king and queen of heaven. Wherefore, motherhood being greatly honoured, only certain women were set apart by the tribe for the bearing of children. They were chosen for their manifold gifts. Only these women, who might be the mothers of heroes and wise men, were suffered to bring forth life. Nor were they held in subjection as thou wouldst hold them in subjection, Paul. For the slave-mother will bear a slavish son. Curse the woman and thou cursest man in the coming generation.

"Now, in that golden age, as certain women were chosen for motherhood, so were certain among the wisest of the people chosen to administer the affairs of the tribe. In our day neither

women, slaves, nor poor freedmen may sit in the high places however noble the god that stirreth within them. So our loss is great. In our time the worship of the wonder-woman no more prevaieth among the nations; wherefore we breed men with little souls, and the race of the heroes has vanished from the earth. Until that day comes again when we respect our race and show reverence for parenthood by our worship of the sun-goddess and her child, we shall torment one another and greed, jealousy, defilement and woe will prevail.

"The life and joy of that golden age were bound up in the fierce wild life of the sun; so was it noble and fine; and with its perishing, man fell; and now he is governed by the red dragon and by the beast to whom he has given authority. In that golden age the nation was shaped according to the ordering of a community of bees. There were many workers and only a few chosen queens, bearers of life. But men were not as the drones of the hive. They were mighty in wisdom or in strength, noble artificers, wondrous poets, marvellous shapers of the daily life of the tribe. So peace reigned over the earth; for all were artificers of this golden dream. The red dragon slumbered, wherefore war was not known, neither was oppression the rule of all government. Every man ate and was filled, every man had his share.

"But there came a time when the red dragon waked from his long sleep and sought to devour the son of the wonder-woman. A new age changed the ways of the tribe. But before I continue my Chronicle of the Years, I would name the red dragon and the green dragon and interpret these signs. Know that within and without man there dwelleth a god and a demon. These twain may slumber and make no stir for a great while, but suddenly will one or the other spring forth, and the soul of man is overcome.

"Now the red dragon beareth only evil with him. He is the one who causeth a man to slay his father, to torment and persecute, to practise all manner of filthiness. He is the woe-bearer and woe-bringer, and he is ruler in this age of corruption and decay. But the green dragon is the god who maketh an instrument of man and worketh miracles through him. With the great life-power he causeth the feeble to become mighty, raiseth up the babe to confound the learned. The green dragon was the god within thy prophet Joseph who whispered to him the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream, who gave this humble slave that wisdom which led him to be raised up as the ruler of the

whole land of Egypt and as chief among his own brethren. Thou hast spoken of thy Master Jesus, and thou hast told me how He healed the sick and waked a dead man from the sleep of death. Verily, this miracle was wrought through the power of the god within Him. Thou didst greatly move me with the chronicle of the Resurrection of this mighty Master's own body. For this miracle also came through the potency of the green dragon, who, veritably, uncoiled himself within this Jesus of Nazareth, filling His body with power beyond human knowledge and human wisdom."

"Thou knowest naught concerning the mystery of Christ," cried Paul. "Defile not His Name by coupling it with these foul pagan images."

"I crave thy pardon, Paul. Thou didst lead me astray by calling Jesus Son of Man as well as Son of God. Wherefore, I spoke of Him as a man." Here the seer, with a wave of his hand, sought to stem the vehement, eager words that Paul would utter. "I pray thee bear with my folly for a while longer. Then I shall be prepared to hearken to thy doctrine from sunrise even to sunset."

Paul bowed his head in assent; for he desired to know the whole of this foolish Mystery, this vain superstition that had led men in past ages to worship the sun-goddess, and those they named the king and queen of heaven.

"There are, therefore, two manifestations of the dragon in each man," continued Symphorus. "And either he cometh upon him as a radiant glory when he is power, light, joy and wisdom, or he envelopeth him, like a dark red cloud, when he beareth fierce tyranny, cruelty, gloom, anguish and subtle craft. And behold, as it is for the man so it is for all creation. There are underworld powers and heavenly powers. The sun, the wandering stars, the earth and all living things can also be possessed by either the noble dragon or the demon-dragon. And that time when this red beast sought to devour the child of the sun-goddess was the age of the flooding of the world when earth was carved into new shapes and nations, like chaff, were swept away.

"In the new cycle there remained, among the remnant of men who were preserved, the faded memory of the worship of the sun-goddess by the people of the tribes. And certain small nations strove to preserve the worship of the Great Mother and the practices of these many tribes who, in that vanished golden age, had been bound together by a council of wise men who guarded the doors of the underworld and did not suffer the evil

dragon with the face of a serpent to break forth. Howsoever, those small nations perished in this new time of blood and destruction. In that season only the warriors and those barbarians practised in war, practised in the arts of the red dragon, held authority and rule. Wherefore the mother and the son were flung from their lofty place in the hearts and minds of men. And, as the sky-woman was driven into the wilderness so was this, the only true worship, driven from the lives of the people. But, with a few, the memory of it remained, and the son and the woman of the golden robes were not, and never will be, devoured.

"From time to time, in the age that followed in the chronicle of the earth, prophets and seers would rise up and strive, in some shape, to bear a vision of truth to men; and one of these dealt the dragon a deadly wound. Know, Paul, that in certain seasons, the green dragon uncoilth himself in me through my practices within the Ancient Mystery, and then he bestoweth on me infinite wisdom, the treasure of divine discernment. Before I encountered thee I saw, as in a vision, that thy Christ dealt this fearful wound to the red dragon. Wherefore, being in part overcome, this baleful one summoned the beast with seven heads and ten horns out of the sea. Dost thou remember the word graven upon those heads?"

"Yea, Blasphemy writ in letters of scarlet."

"And canst thou interpret this sign?"

"Nay, I have no understanding of it."

"Subtle and crafty is that seven-headed beast. In the ages to come he will seek authority over all nations and people in the name of the Great Prophet. We initiates call the dealer of the deadly wound by that title. But I alone know that He is Jesus the Christ. In a future time a fearful blasphemy will be committed. Men will change the lovely vision of Jesus and shape it according to their own evil imagination. They will murder and torment the people, declaring that it is in the service of the Great Prophet. They will hold the places of authority in His Name and make men their slaves by instilling the fear of Christ in their hearts, and will rule in part through that fear, and in part through the evil dragon which will be roused up in every nation.

"And when the power of this noble but defiled Name waneth the ancient monster will summon a second beast which hath the two horns of the goat and is veritably the child of the infernal gods; and upon his horns are written 'Knowledge of

Evil.' Through this knowledge he will work vile miracles. He will not make it serve any good purpose, it will only destroy and bear distress and weariness, and at the last, despair to men.

"Thou mayest ask how it is that the lovely vision of the Great Prophet can be corrupted. As I declared to thee in a previous hour, however marvellous its beauty it contains the seeds of death, for the signs of this worship are but faith, hope and charity. Desire for wisdom and the power of its light are not contained in this lovely dream. Wherefore, it must fail in the third age of the cycle, be overcome by 'Knowledge of Evil' which can command men as faith, hope and love can never command. Wisdom alone governeth the power of life. And where will it be found in that hour of the might of the third beast? Knowledge of fire and of its malevolence will be a weapon that overcometh the good for a time.

"I have here spoken of thy Master, Paul, as the Wise One, who, in the first of the three ages, wounds and almost overcomes the beast. But know that I speak of only one cycle. Other mighty seers have arisen in other cycles, and in the first age have wounded the beast. But always because the seeds of death lie hid in their teaching is the good they would serve overcome, and their vision of truth is changed into a foul lie. And with this lie, in the name of the Great Prophet, the beasts of wickedness rule. Wherefore, the Chronicle of the Years is dark with pain.

"Always there reigneth blasphemy. And behold, the yellow leopard skin is the power of gold, and the feet of the bear the power of man's sword, and the mouth of the lion greed and jealousy which cause the rulers to snatch all for themselves, to pay no heed to the hungry people.

"Paul, I have known of many past beliefs, I have studied the ancient times. But among the seers there has been none like unto Jesus. Truly God dwelleth in Him, so I revere His Name. Thou art His high priest but thou art not this Great Prophet in the very texture of thy spiritual being. I have called thee mine enemy, though no man of understanding will call Jesus aught save friend and beloved."

"Thou hast no knowledge of the Master I serve. My words alone have borne to thee tidings of Him," cried Paul.

"Nay, Paul, I guarded that secret. But I will no longer withhold it. I have seen Jesus, yea and in Nazareth, and I hearkened to His words."

Then was the saint troubled and confused in soul, for he perceived that he had encountered no mean adversary.

"Thou art mine enemy, Paul," continued the seer, "because thy dark vision of a half truth will draw men away from the search for the whole truth which is only to be discovered in this Ancient Mystery, in the worship of the wonder-woman and her child, wisdom. Only in the fierce, joyful life of the sun, only in the radiance of the green dragon, in the deep peace of the deliverer's wisdom can salvation be found for the men of earth. And, despite the nobility of thine understanding, thou despisest the joy of the sun's wild life, hatest my reverence for that wisdom which would see in all who bear the coming generation the Great Mother, the guardian of the precious treasure of the seed of men, its nourisher. Behold, the red dragon warreth with the green dragon for thy soul, Paul. Thou wouldst rule and have authority, yet true wisdom is not thy portion. And lo, the hour will come when all that vision of thine will turn to corruption and decay; and until that hour, only a few good men or true will seek the one worship which can bear back to earth the golden age, that kingdom of heaven, that echo of the paradise that dwelleth out yonder."

The seer flung forth his hand, pointing towards the stars. "So, Paul, though we are brothers in understanding our souls are adversaries. Between us there can be no peace until the salvation I declare is won for men. Thou mayest ask why I do not follow thine ensample and bear tidings of it to the nations. But the hour is not yet come. Men are still as children in understanding. Also I know that thy strange belief would overcome my wisdom. Thou dost offer men terror of life, terror of death. For after death they may be tormented according to thy teaching. Thou seest naught but foulness in the love and worship of men and women for one another. And I see how, when wielded in innocence and goodness, it is the pith and marrow of what I call life, and will then rouse but the green dragon of beauty within the man and the woman.

"Howsoever, all the Chronicle of the Years must be played out beneath the shining firmament before men will come to the knowledge of the golden age, before their bodies are changed, and they find rebirth, joy and truth, in the worship of the Great Mother, in the wisdom of her Son."

CHAPTER XIII

THE stillness of the green dawn hung above the bare mountains when Paul and Symphorus again faced one another. The saint had passed much of the night in prayer for the deliverance of the seer from the nets of his false beliefs; and the pleader with God declared that in this wise man was a nobility of understanding that might make of him a serviceable weapon in the warfare for Christ.

In the brightness of that early day the seer's face appeared rugged and wrinkled as an ancient oak. He was of a great age, but time had not dimmed the light in his eye, nor in any way trammelled the swiftness of his mind. Now he greeted Paul with courteous words, and when they had partaken of wine and bread invited the saint to interpret the mystery of creation for him.

The two masters gazed out upon the sunrise as Paul took up the challenge, declaring his vision.

"First I would speak of the spell thou didst set upon me so that the dream thou didst show me was as plain to my sight as was that tumult in the streets of Gades. Most courteous host, it seemed scarce fitting to ensnare me thus with thy dark magic. I am but a simple servant of my Lord Jesus, and I would have none of these things. Howsoever, I am guarded, and despite mine own weakness no arrow of the adversary can prevail because my Master's angels watch over me, and He is with me even in these forsaken places.

"Now I will first speak of the Garden of Innocents which thou hast, to my mind, wrongly interpreted. Nor dost thou know the whole count of it. This Garden of Innocents is a false tale that had its roots in a true happening in that first abode of man which we Jews call the Garden of Eden. I have already declared the beginning of creation to thee; I would but have thee remember how Adam fell into a deep sleep, and God then shaped Eve out of a rib of his body. I would call to thy mind how Eve disobeyed God and obeyed the command of the Serpent, eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and tempting the man with it. Now, by this first disobedience sin

and death came into the world. And lo, it was through the fault of the woman. Wherefore it is written, and it is God's will, that she should be in subjection to man. In this wild unhallowed adoration of a Sun-Goddess thou wouldst set up in the high place the woman who is mother, and thou wouldst choose equally amongst men and women those who shall teach and have authority."

"Nay, not equally, Paul. I would choose only from among the wise. If there be more wise men than wise women then shall the former have rule in greater number. And if the wife possess the gift of wisdom, then of a surety she should, in her household, have authority."

"Verily, thou art woefully in error," cried Paul. "Know that man is the image and glory of God, whereas woman is the glory of man. So, as man should obey God woman should obey man. This is but right and fitting, and we know it is God's express will. For Adam was first formed, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived. But Eve, being deceived, was in the transgression, wherefore we have the holy ordinance of marriage, and the woman is saved through childbearing.

"It is written, that by reason of her first transgression, she shall be obedient, silent, sober and devout. Only thus will she give no occasion for sin. If she would serve God she must serve man who is in God's image, and she must not usurp authority. Thou dost speak of the flowing life that suddenly leaps up within man, overcoming him. Thou dost set it in words, naming it the green or red dragon. But thine interpretation sheweth a strange ignorance of the nature of this manifestation. The red dragon is the old Adam in man, and when miracles are wrought by good men then it is through the power of the Holy Spirit, through the grace of the one God. That grace worked within Moses, within David, within all our prophets.

"And now I would show thee the vanity of thy worship. The sun is but a golden orb set in the heavens by the living God, so that its rays may give light to the earth. It is as great a folly to worship sun, moon or stars as to worship bird, beast or fish which is the custom of many ignorant heathen. For there is neither understanding nor knowledge in the beast nor in the sun, moon nor stars.

"Now having gone utterly astray through the transgression of Eve, all men sin, and they cannot through any power of theirs escape from that sinning. God was very wrathful with the beings He had created. Howsoever, we Christians are reconciled to God

through His Son. We are saved from this wrath by the life of Christ. Truly, God is merciful, inasmuch as He sent His only begotten Son Jesus to earth so that in His life and in His death He should atone for the sins of men. We who believe in Christ and in the one God are washed clean of sin, and by our repentance wholly redeemed from it. We are reborn in our Lord Jesus, and for us salvation cometh. Christ by His death took the burden of our sins upon Himself."

And here Symphorus spoke swiftly, "Then all that is demanded of man is repentance. He may sin and sin again, yet if he declare his repentance he will pay no penalty, for thy Christ hath made atonement for him. Veritably, Paul, this is foolishness. Each man must pay the debt he owes to destiny. However filthy his acts he can, according to thy teaching, escape the torments of the underworld if he declares his repentance and belief in thy God."

"Nay, but he must show through his goodness and his holiness, through the purity of his deeds and thoughts the proof of his belief in Christ, else is his repentance vain," answered Paul.

"Thou callest the love between man and woman sin," said the sage. "I call it the flowing beautiful life that cometh from the breath of the green dragon, that is nourished by the fire from the sky-woman's robes. Thou seest naught but evil in the flesh. I perceive goodness and truth in its union with the soul. But that can only come through the harmony bestowed on it by wisdom which is the gift of the spirit."

"Nay, the body is evil because it nourishes carnal desires," cried Paul. "But carnal desires can be transfigured by celestial grace. Know that there is a sin of which all men are guilty. For every child of Adam is doomed through the transgression of Eve. Through Eve all men die; through Christ shall all be made alive."

"And what is thy authority for this saying?"

"My vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus, my communion with the Holy Spirit. Verily, I am weak and sinful, but the Holy Spirit speaketh through me, and hath set these sayings in my mouth. Also I have held speech with the disciples of the Master, and they testify to the truth revealed to me in the mystery of Christ."

Symphorus rose up, walking to and fro in that small chamber of stone, halting and gazing at the spreading light without. The eastern skies were all green and gold, and the seer raised his hands in greeting to it. "Behold the outward signs of my

worship," he cried; "Behold the robe of that glorious flowing life to which thou art blind, brother Paul. I too have hearkened to Jesus of Nazareth. His words and parables were pure and fresh and lovely as this dawn. The poorest shepherds of the hills had understanding of them. But thou declarest a doctrine which darkens and bewilders the mind as clouds will dull the glory of this wondrous dawn."

Again the seer thrust forth his hand, pointing to clouds frowning and red, which were marching up from the southern skies, and soon would put out the radiance of that first light.

"Thy words are not Christ's words," continued the aged sage. "But thy words prevail with men in a future time even as these clouds will prevail. I would, therefore, show thee the fruits of thy labours. I will take thee once more into the region wherein is graven the dream of the future ages, the dream of the infinite. Howsoever, I would first ask thee if this tale of the Garden of Eden is fable or truth. Dost thou believe that life began in that fashion?"

"Yea, yea," cried the saint; "I tell thee of a true happening."

"Then, verily, the acts of thy God bewilder and confuse my understanding. I would call the God who cursed all Eve's daughters the evil demon I name the red dragon. For only will the principle of evil take vengeance on the innocent, cause suffering for unnumbered years to be the lot of all women—cause tormented man to labour among thistles and thorns, with sweating brow to drag bread from the ground."

At this saying Paul rebuked Symphorus for his blasphemy. But the sternness departed from his countenance and his voice when he thought of the vanity and ignorance in which this Mystery-Worshipper had been nurtured. And he said, "I sorrow for thee, Symphorus, and pity thee in thy darkness. I was as weak and foolish a sinner in the days of my youth. Know that when Eve loosed evil upon the earth she gave herself over to Satan. Wherefore she and all her seed were condemned by her own error, but God, in His mercy, perceived that she could, through suffering and through subjection, be saved from it. Nay, more, in His great love, He sent His only Son into the world so that, through the sacrifice and resurrection of that Son, mankind should be reconciled to the good. Thou speakest of wisdom as the highest virtue. But the thoughts of the wise in this world are vain. Earthly knowledge puffs up; love edifies. The only true wisdom is the love of Christ realized, so that the man is love as Christ is love."

"I desire to show thee the triumph of belief in Jesus as interpreted by Paul, his priest," said the seer. "It is one of the images in the Chronicle of the Years which hath been declared unto me. I can but gaze, as through a window, on eternity. Wherefore, only as far as the glance of the inner eye travelleth may my sight journey. And by holding thy hand, laying mine upon thy brow, I can draw thee to this window and discover to thine eyes the same vision."

As the seer spoke these last words Paul rose up and strove with him. But swiftly was he overcome by the elder who thrust him once more upon the couch. And once more there came a murmuring of strings, a soft music that seemed to draw all the saint's strength from him, so that he lay there watching and hearkening as the light faded and the dawn was swallowed up in cloud.

CHAPTER XIV

THERE was a rustle of leaves, a noise of shaken boughs and the whispering of the flying insects of the earth. Light rose and fell about Paul like waves of the sea, and from it after a little while there broke forth seven flames which dispersed the darkness that lay over a valley, and looking down as from a great height Paul saw the secrets of the future revealed as in a mirror.

A city of white temples and marble palaces, of small houses and mean crooked streets lay in that valley. From it rose the murmur of the swarming people below. They came and went and busied themselves with feasting, games and barter. And as he looked downwards Paul saw the persecution of the saints in Cæsar's garden. They were the sport of the populace, cast to the lions in the arena, defenceless, forsaken, their limbs and tender flesh broken and torn into little pieces by the wild beasts, for they had refused to deny Christ.

Suddenly the scene was blotted out. And now Paul saw a man whose back was bent with age, who could scarcely walk, and whose whole body was bowed down. The soldiers who marched beside him showed a certain respect for this small, twisted ancient. A hush fell. None of the lewd cries of the arena-mob pierced that stillness. No light jest or coarse mockery destroyed the solemnity of the hour.

And lo, the executioner raised his weapon; the captain of the guard spoke the sentence of death. Then Symphorus plucked at Paul crying, commanding, "Look upon his face, brother. Hearken to the good confession he maketh for his Master Christ. Honour the boldness of his testimony. Reverence the undying spirit of the man who has witnessed what seemed to be the overthrow of the great enterprise of his life, of the Temple he builded in hope, despite many adversities, dedicating to it the best years of his life."

Paul would not look as Symphorus bade him for he dreaded lest he should learn the aged prisoner's name. And while he resisted the vision faded, but his fear remained and he trembled, and his speech was holden and in deep anguish of spirit he was like one in a swoon.

Then, slowly, to his mind returned the memory of those many persecutions of the saints which he had witnessed. And as he numbered them and reckoned up the few denials and the many bold testimonies borne by his martyred brethren he rejoiced and exulted and declared their triumph to Symphorus.

But the dark face of the seer drew close to Paul as he laughed, saying, "Yea, brother, all these souls knew Christ through thee; and noble were they in their deaths, mighty their testimony. Thou shouldst be proud and uplifted, brother, that thou art the shaper and creator of this wondrous heroism, this lofty spirit of sacrifice. But look again and gaze upon thy handiwork once more."

And Paul now perceived Judæa and all the countries round about that land. The shock of battle, the cries of perishing armies rose upon the wind, and he learned that in the Name of Christ fierce warriors from the north made war upon the heathen in these southern regions. And he perceived how they harried and slew, giving themselves up to deeds of cruelty and lust, and he was greatly confounded and abashed.¹

"Blot out this image, blot it out," entreated Paul; "I cannot look any more upon these dark unspeakable things."

So this piece of time was plucked away, and a brooding darkness like the darkness before creation gathered about the watchers.

Howbeit, the end was not yet come. In a little while the face of the years peered and peeped once more through that enveloping night. And Paul hearkened to the counsel taken by iron-faced, greedy men who sat in the high places, who offered lip-service to God, raising up to Him mighty temples, gathering within their walls all the treasures of the earth.

Then, for a space the saint was stirred by the honour paid to Jesus and by the sight of the multitude which thronged those temples, worshipping the Great Name, hearkening to the words of the preacher, which were, veritably, certain of the sayings of Paul.

And now, he was glad as never before. He cried that his dream of a church that spanned the whole wide earth was fulfilled. But even as he gave thanks for the praise of God and Jesus spoken in many strange tongues, he saw that the rulers who outwardly honoured God, building noble temples, did so but to give countenance to their own sin. They wielded the Name of Jesus and

¹ These visions evidently refer to Paul's death and the Crusades.

the name of Paul as weapons, with them tormenting and destroying the poor and the humble. They made a spoil, they made a prey of the husbandmen, the craftsmen, of all who were not warriors, in the name of Christ.

He perceived that they burned men and women even as Cæsar had caused the saints to be burned. They justified themselves and their cruel deeds of torment with the words of Paul and in the Name of Christ. And lo, evil was heaped on evil, woe on woe through the teachings of the Church the saint had founded. And in his anguish, he cried out upon them; he sought to stay the sentences pronounced by the rulers. He commanded, protested, declared that they had twisted his sayings into a foul and abominable lie. But the princes of the Church hearkened to him no more than if he were a shadow, they continued to commit abominations in the Name of the one living God, and to uphold them with the words they said were those of Paul, the great saint of Tarsus.

And lo, age by age, image by image, the chronicle passed. War followed war, strife followed strife; and all nations hated one another in the name of the Church, in the Name of the God of charity and faith raised up by Paul.

So he strove to escape from seeing, strove to free himself from the burden of the lamentations that filled his hearing. And, for a space, the imaged life of time was withheld from his sight; quiet reigned; and in that quiet his fainting spirit was refreshed so that his tormentor urged him, if he were not afraid, once more to face the mystery that was seemingly conjured up from the very bowels of the earth.

And now Paul perceived that the world had changed in all that was outward, but what was inward and of the soul had not changed.

Many strange creatures passed to and fro upon the earth. The saint had not looked upon their like before. They were in the semblance of serpents and locusts, bearing men, women and children within their bellies; but they did not devour them; they spewed them forth; and at times such creatures travelled with the speed of a shooting star.

The face of the heavens was also changed. Flocks of great birds journeyed across the skies, and these too bore within their bodies the shapes of men and women.

Then the saint was astonished and trembled because of the sights and scenes of earth. For these also were strange to him. But he perceived that many churches were empty of worshippers;

the names of Christ and Paul forgotten by the multitude and remembered only by a few saints who dwelled, far from the turmoil of the vast cities, in quiet ways. And men multiplied exceedingly and their sorrows multiplied, for they were aware of the spirit, yet turned their backs upon goodness and truth, whoring after these new creatures, these strange gods.

They fought and tormented one another for the possession of these beasts and birds, and their minds were filled with the desire for gold so that they might have power over these creatures. Hideous indeed were the follies of the mass of men, and they found neither health nor true joy in their lives. Greater than ever was the darkness of their ignorance.

"Verily, I gaze into the Pit. This is not the earth," were the words of Paul. And because his soul was torn by the evil and the despair of the nations, he strove again to blot out the image presented in that foul mystery.

"Patience, brother," said the seer. "The day is coming, the chronicle of the years of damnation is nigh to its end."

Gazing into the western mists, Paul saw a pale light, and there appeared within that light a stranger who, though he was in the semblance of man, was not like him in any other manner, for his soul shone forth as a radiance that lit up his countenance.

An inscription was set above his head. "I come not to bring peace but a sword." Such was the reading of this writing. But, in a little while, it faded, and there was shaped in its stead the words, "I come with the sword of wisdom, bearing peace."

"Behold the deliverer," said the seer.

And fainting and hard pressed in spirit Paul beheld the One he had encountered on the road to Damascus.

"The long travail is ended," murmured Symphorus; "the deliverer has come to earth; and the multitude of every race, faith and clime will see their master and their prophet in that face. Verily, nations and people find rebirth, joy and truth in the worship of the Great Mother, in the worship and wisdom of her Son."

Then the saint was beside himself as he cried out on this blasphemy of the Great Mother. And he yearned to look once more upon the face of the Beloved. But it seemed as if a live serpent coiled itself about him. He wrestled with these bonds, striving with all his might against them. Of a sudden they broke like wythes of straw, and he stood in a void. "Master, Master," was

his cry to that wide loneliness. But there came no answer; no shaft of light pierced the rolling mists.

And once again as in his youth he knew that he was blind.

Then his understanding was smitten, and it seemed that his very body was being riven asunder. But, after that anguish, there gathered about him the cold, smothering vapour of death. He strove again and yet again with it, yet might not force a way through to the light and the vision that lay beyond. All strength went from him, his spirit yielding, and he sank slowly, surely, into unfathomable night.

CHAPTER XV

LUKE, Crescens and Andronicus were greatly troubled when they learned that Symphorus had carried Paul into the country in his chariot. They feared him as an enemy, but in the late evening they learned that he was a friend; for his slave bore them tidings of the safety of their master.

He delivered to them a parchment on which was written the oath of the Mystery-Worshipper. "In the Name of the Ancient Wisdom I promise to guard and preserve the body of Paul of Tarsus till such time as the danger for him in Gades is passed." Thus ran the words of this letter; and the saints rejoiced for the name of Paul and the sign of the Cross were set beside the name of Symphorus.

They held counsel together, and in the days that followed, went quietly to and fro among the humble folk of the town—persuading many of these to believe in Christ. Then, when there came a second messenger from Symphorus they determined to depart from Gades, appointing Andronicus as Overseer of the Church in that city.

The messenger travelled in a chariot and bade Crescens enter it, saying that his master had need of him. So Luke declared that he would journey to Corduba which is the famed city of learning in Hispania, not far from Gades, being in the province of Bætica. Wherefore he took leave of Andronicus, promising to abide in Corduba until such time as Paul joined him in this city of the red temples that was the key to the door of understanding in Hispania.

Now Symphorus was a crafty seer. He knew that Luke was a man of words and weight, so he would not bid him to his abode in the mountains. This Greek might declare publicly the evil and the arts of Mystery that were practised there; and for the sage this place was like the nest of a bird—he would keep it as a secret from the people of that land. Crescens was youthful and of a softer temper, wherefore Symphorus would keep the oath of the Ancient Wisdom, delivering up to him the living body of Paul.

The saint was in a low fever, and Symphorus believed that it sprang from a mind that had been wounded in those hours

when he sought to make an assault upon the soul of the Master of Tarsus. He himself was sore spent because of the roused evil of those past hours. Only Crescens might bear Paul healing. So this brother traversed the yellow plain in the chariot drawn by horses almost as swift as swallows. And he gazed upon the mountains of Bætica and travelled up their rocky ways.

For him there were no fears of the spirit when he entered into the caves and came at last into the presence of his master. Glad were their greetings, and from that hour, Paul mended; the fever passed. In the quiet one evening, as he rested on a rocky perch above the plain he opened his mind to Crescens, telling him of those evil scenes that had passed before his sight.

"Truly they were monstrous imaginings conjured up and painted on the air," said the saint, "by this Master of the Mysteries, Symphorus. Verily, he showed me profane fables, shaping them in the forms of dreams, and he declared the doctrine of devils, prophesying for the end the rule of the heathen goddess, the Great Mother Isis, over the masses of men. And even as he spoke this lie it was answered. For lo, I perceived the face of my Lord as it appeared unto me on the road to Damascus. In this hour when it seemed that I was passing hence, that vision bore to me the truth and the life. It told of the destruction of the heathen beliefs, the promise of the Saviour that He shall come once more to earth and deliver the elect at the ending of the Chronicle of the Years. So before I fainted away and was not, my soul was uplifted and faith renewed."

For a space the sick man held his peace, and it was Crescens who broke the silence, asking why Symphorus had preserved the life of the saint in the time of the turmoil in Gades.

"Assuredly, the oath was given to thee, my brother, that no hurt should befall my body. For the enemy sought a subtler way, sought to wound unto death my soul with these lies, these false abominations. Better indeed for me to be slain by the men of Gades than for my spirit to perish through the arts and practices of this seer. He led me into the underworld, into those dark habitations of Satan that may not be named.

"Truly, Crescens, I have encountered the Tempter in the shape of man. But I have not been overcome. Be wary, my son, while thou art in these mountains, for here dwelleth the Mystery of Iniquity, the Son of Perdition."

And now Paul fell back spent and weary from having declared the temptation, the great evil he had beheld. Crescens spoke

comfortable words, and remaining wakeful, sat beside his master all that night. Towards morning the stillness was broken by the playing of soft music, by strange sounds and melodies that stirred and moved the heart of the watcher.

He perceived that the sleeper was not roused, only muttering, uneasily, tossing to and fro.

In the hour when the first light of the sun struck through the opening in the rock Symphorus entered the chamber bearing a vial; and from it rose a vapour that filled the air with sweet fragrance. And the seer stood in the midst of that chamber, speaking strange words in an unknown tongue, then he turned and made signs upon the air above the head of the sleeper. But as Crescens was about to lay violent hands upon him he smiled, withdrawing to the opening in the rock, and bowing to the eastern light.

"I have failed, as in my heart I knew I should fail, to win this man's understanding," said the Master of Mysteries. "So, behold, it is sealed from henceforth; and he will know naught of the happenings in those past hours of revelation. Speak not of it to him, or to any of thy people, for verily, what is hidden shall remain hidden till it is imaged and shaped in the flow of the countless years."

Having uttered these words, Symphorus passed from the presence of Paul and Crescens.

In the days that followed the young disciple learned, piece by piece, by little signs and by sayings that these unspeakable things were blotted out from the remembrance of his master. Only there remained the knowledge that he had met Satan face to face in the copper mountains of Bætica, that he had wrestled in the spirit with this mystery of Iniquity and had triumphed at the last.

CHAPTER XVI

IT was with the young men who studied the philosophies in Corduba that Luke conversed, for he knew that, wisely instructed, they might become leaders and teachers of the next generation, influencing it for good even as Seneca influenced the youthful Cæsar in Rome.

In the past the Romans had been men of deeds rather than men of thought. They valued knowledge if it gave them power, but they had little wisdom, and therefore, despite their greatness, were a people of narrow vision. They peered through a small window upon life, whereas certain seers of Hispania stood as on a mountain top, gazing upon eternity. And the noblest of them all was Seneca, now first citizen of Rome. He guided the youth Nero, directing all that was of moment in the administration. So the people of divers nations rejoiced in a freedom and prosperity they had never known before. From Syria to Hispania, from Egypt to Britannia rule and order reigned, thanks to the Seer of Corduba. And every citizen of the Empire might demand and obtain justice however unenlightened the people of his nation, because of that one man of Hispania who lived as simply as a poor shepherd in his splendid palace in the city of the Cæsars.

But Luke would find a Christian Cæsar in Corduba. It was the secret wish of his heart to come upon a young man he could shape and fashion in the likeness of Seneca, but one who possessed the knowledge of the Master, the sure faith and belief in Christ. Afterwards when he spoke of this dream to Paul the saint called it a folly, an error of the understanding.

Howbeit, Luke gathered together a score of young students in Corduba who came and hearkened to his teachings each evening, and in time, preparing to be baptized, to go forth among their own people into the north of Hispania and to the farthest borders of Lusitania, declaring the new truths and salvation in which all men might share.

Now the leader of the flower of the youth in Corduba was a rich man named Torquatus. He had journeyed to Rome and had known the splendour of the life in that city. Once a

virtuous stoic he had fallen away, being somewhat corrupted by the pleasures of the Romans. He was twenty-five or twenty-six years of age when he returned to his own city, and therefore might well lead the younger men in the things of the mind and the world in that town.

And soon he perceived that he held his companions no more. When evening came they made excuses, departing from his house and his gardens. They were afraid to tell him of the new vision that had been shown them, for they feared his light speech and his mockery. But the secret might not be guarded for any long time. Torquatus followed the young men and came to an open space near to a small olive grove and house on the borders of Corduba. There he beheld a company of youths who were gathered about a stranger, and he quietly joined them, hearkening to the words of Luke for the space of an hour or more.

When the speaker ceased from utterance he lifted up his voice, saying: "Friends, brothers, I would answer this Greek and show him that there are two faces to every piece of money, two sides to every matter of philosophy and belief."

Torquatus was angered because he perceived that his companions had been carried away from him by this stranger, and he believed that they were caught in one of the many superstitions that came from the east; so he spoke with vehemence:

"I have been in Rome, friends, and I have sat at the feet of Seneca who came from this city and is, peradventure, the wisest man in the known world. He spake not of this new God, Christ; he holdeth not with the belief in many gods. Reason and virtue were the foundations upon which he held that man should build his life, and mould the design of the years. We have many temples raised to gods in Hispania. Janus reigneth over our city, Endovellicus guardeth the fortunes of Lusitania, Mercury-Melcarth watcheth over Gades, and Isis and many another are worshipped in the Hither and Further Provinces. It is folly to add to the number of the gods by setting up this Christ, it is far better for us, who are of the younger generation, to add to the world's wisdom through the power of reason. Though I am not wholly in agreement with the sage, Seneca," boasted Torquatus. "He teaches that men of all ages should practise virtue and self-denial, and expend themselves for a time in labour for the common weal while yet maintaining that the highest life is the life of contemplation. 'Those who do nothing do more than others' was his contention. And I have no doubt that he purposes in a later

season to fulfil this, the true destiny of the sage. But I hold that we, who are young men, should seek every pleasure, every joy—delight in women, in wine and in the sunshine of the flowing hours. Swiftly this spring passes, swiftly will our spring pass. Let us make what we can of the scanty measure of vigorous days allotted to each of us; and then, as true philosophers, in our middle age, we will practise the virtuous life of contemplation enjoined by Seneca, and declared by him in many wise sayings."

Now Luke sought to stay the flowing course of this young man's words. But he was silenced by the sudden sharp manner in which the speaker turned upon him, saying, "Thou wouldst have us lead a virtuous life, loving all men, denying ourselves all things so that in a future time we shall be rewarded with joy and peace in Paradise. But know that when we go down into the grave we go into everlasting silence. Verily, men waste the present as if it were of no account, looking always to a future which may never come. Wherefore, young men of Corduba, I bid you follow me. I bid you, as the bee, taste the honey of every flower, seeking enjoyment in women and in all the pleasures that we can gather from the years. If you are caught in this man's net you will lose the present for the sake of a future which ends in the everlasting stillness of the tomb."

Perceiving that Torquatus paused, Luke took up the word, saying, "The tomb is not the end. We pass through it to another life, of suffering for sin, or of deliverance from all pain. If you young men of Corduba will take to your heart the sayings of Christ as I have imparted them to you this deliverance will be yours. And if you walk in His way you will find the peace and joy that cometh only out of the one Truth, which so far has been hidden and is now revealed."

The youths were ill-mannered, and losing patience, bawled at Luke, crying out, "We will hearken no more to this ignorant Greek. We follow Torquatus. Speak out, Torquatus. Thy words are true words that show this stranger's saying to be a vain superstition."

In other sentences the young noble of Bætica repeated all that he had already said, and the young men applauded, promising their adherence to this way of the flesh, which, they babbled, was the road of the wise. Whereas Luke would have them demean themselves, putting on the garments of beggars, the meekness of hirelings and slaves.

All this while there rested two travellers on the edge of the slope within the shade of the olives. None of the group of

youths observed them, but now they came forward ; and one was a man straight as a forest tree, the other a bent ancient whose robe was so travel-stained that he seemed, to these ignorant Bæticans, a vagabond of ignoble mien.

Through the gathering dusk he advanced upon Torquatus. And when he was near this windy orator a ray from the departing sun made a circle of light about him and also about that cluster of men who held the promise of Bætica's future.

The ancient was Paul and when, straightening his bowed body, he faced Torquatus there came a change, a rustle and a stir among those who hearkened, as he whom they decided to be a vagabond now by reason of his look and speech declared himself to be a man of authority.

Torquatus was silent, for he was suddenly rendered uneasy and held by the power of that piercing eye that fastened upon his countenance.

"Brother," said Paul ; "thou speakest the words of betrayal. Boast no more."

Torquatus tried to answer boldly but could only mutter, "Stranger, what is thy business? Where is thy authority?"

"Verily, brother," answered Paul ; "my authority is not of this world. It is of another. And in the Great Name I conjure thee to be silent. For in this philosophy of thine thou declarest thy doom. Before this spring of Bætica has passed away the snares of death will encompass thee about and thou shalt know the greatest of all fears that are held by foolish men ; thou shalt know the fear of eternal darkness, of a night of which thou hast no knowledge."

Torquatus did not utter any word. He was as one star-stricken, gaping and making a foolish mouth. He did not believe these words of Paul and had no understanding of their import. It was the strong, deep voice of this seemingly feeble ancient, the power of the Spirit flowing from him, that mastered, overthrew and confounded this man who was in the pride of his youth, in the bloom of his years.

His followers murmured, saying, "Speak, Torquatus. What is amiss? Prove to this stranger that his words are foolishness."

But their leader remained silent, for the spiritual power of the Seer of Tarsus held him as with a spell.

"Remember my words, son ; and in thine hour of need summon me and I will come to thee." Thus saying, Paul turned himself about, and slowly, wearily, toiled upwards to the door of the house, entering therein.

Then it was as if chains were loosed and the limbs of Torquatus freed. But speech had been reft from him. He turned. Thrusting aside his followers, he went his way disappearing into the gathering night.

Luke and Crescens followed after Paul; for they always feared the weakness that followed the fatigue of a journey or after the hour of his illumination. Truly, he had been as some great light that is set in the heavens, dazzling Torquatus with his radiance. And the young men hung about for a little while. Then forgetting the long speeches of Torquatus, whispering one to another concerning this mysterious stranger, they went in two's and three's down the slope of the olives, seeking in that dusk the comfort of the lights of Corduba, the assurance of the crowded streets of that town.

CHAPTER XVII

ON the morrow a messenger bore letters from Gades, written by the Roman brethren. They contained tidings that rejoiced the heart, for they declared that there had been much talk of the good confession made by Paul at his trial before the Prætorium. He had then claimed and won for the disciples the right to preach the doctrine of Christ throughout the Empire; and it seemed that the fine earnestness of Paul, his wisdom, his brave mien had caused certain noblemen and freedmen to inquire into the Gospel taught by this man of Tarsus. Amongst them were Stoics of the ancient families of Rome, and two or three of the servants of Cæsar's household had conversed with Linus; for they desired privily to obtain knowledge; and a freedman called Annaeus of Seneca's household had come in the name of his master, asking for the Roman citizen Paul. He would not speak with any other member of the church and said that when the Master of Tarsus came again to Rome he would be received in audience in the household of Seneca.

This invitation was the highest honour that might be offered in the Empire to one who had knowledge and understanding. Paul was well pleased but sorry that he might not be at Rome and in Corduba in the same hour. So he changed his design, which was to pass a year or more in Hispania, journeying into the wilds of Lusitania and Tarraconensis. He would be in Rome in the coming winter, for now Linus knew that only Paul, given opportunity, might convert the Stoics and those noblemen of discernment who abode in Cæsar's city. Linus possessed no learning; he was a simple brother, filled with zeal, and in truth, had failed in his first encounter with the Stoics. The Saint of Tarsus had received from the Apostles the courteous command that he should seek an honourable retirement for a time; their command springing from their old fear of the turbulence and wrath ever stirred up by Paul. But lo, all was now changed by reason of the praise of Paul's noble testimony to Christ—rendered before the Prefect of the Imperial Court. Now the brethren at Rome entreated him to come

speedily among them again and thus hasten the work of spreading the knowledge of the Master.

But the saint would abide for one more season in Hispania. He liked not to turn back from this rich field before he had sown the grain of truth. So he held counsel with Luke and Crescens; and they determined to dispatch two of the brethren to Astigi, one to Malaca and one to Acci.¹ Only Luke was to remain in Corduba in the company of Paul. Thus wisely were the nets cast over Hispania, and each great town was noted in that land and set down in order by the saint for the visit of one of his disciples.

In this manner had Paul shaped the churches of Asia and of Hellas; for it was ever his design to have the Word declared in every city of each nation within the Empire.

And when the brethren had gone their several ways he sought out the poor of Corduba; for he was not of the same mind as Luke. "If the young men of learning and good parts will not come to me I shall not seek them out," he said. "Verily, I am weary of those who for long hours debate on quibbles of philosophies, who make a play with words, not perceiving that it is the letter that is of little account. The spirit of the word alone will build and create the noble life. Those who, like these youths, are not prepared to receive the spirit, will but waste our precious store of hours, for we may not abide any long time in this town."

Luke answered nothing, but he was sorrowful because the youths he had instructed were now wholly turned from him. From time to time he learned of their rioting and feasting, of the many follies into which they fell through putting into practice the advice of Torquatus.

On an evening of darkness and thunder there came a messenger to the House of the Olives. He was a young man with a troubled mien, and he said: "My friend, Torquatus, is lying wounded unto death, and he desires thy presence before he passes hence." Wherefore Luke hastily girded up his robes, saying, "I will go to him on the instant."

"Nay, nay," cried the young man. "Thou canst not in any way mend his state. He would speak only with the great master. He alone will serve."

And though Paul was weary he rose up and accompanied the messenger through the streets of Corduba and past the red

¹ Gaudix (near Granada).

Temple of Janus. As they walked the young man told of the evil that had befallen his friend.

Following the principles he had laid down, he had cheated a merchant of the city of a great sum in gold. He had also taken from him the woman he loved; and as the merchant could not through the law gain redress, he had broken into the house of Torquatus, slain this woman, and later in a brawl, wounded his enemy with his sword.

"Torquatus crieth for thee all the day," said the messenger, "and declares that he dare not die until he has held speech with thee. Master, I know not if thou hast power over the underworld; for verily, Torquatus seems to be in great fear of thy might and of what thou mayest do unto him if he passes beyond the borders of this present life of ours."

"I know what lies beyond those borders," said Paul. And the young man trembled, for in his trouble wisdom deserted him and he believed the saint to be a wizard who might conjure up evil visions for the departing soul.

So the two walked in silence until they came to the dwelling of the young Bætican nobleman; and in a hall of ivory and cedar near a fountain lay the sick man, and he was crying out because of his pain and the heat of his fever.

Then Paul took his hands, and, saying no word, stroked his brow. In a little while the sickness abated somewhat, and Torquatus had once more command of his understanding.

He whispered his need, for he had no strength because of the blood that he had lost. "Master, I know that I am perishing, and soon the stillness of the grave or the phantoms of the underworld will gather about me, and I am greatly afraid. My vision was false and thine was true. But haply thou art come, and peradventure thou wilt, out of thy wisdom, tell me some way whereby I can bravely face this death."

"Nay, thou wilt not die," said Paul. "This wound was given thee in order that thou mightest live. For truly, in these thy days of pleasure thou wast but groping in the darkness of the flesh. But in a little while, if thou wilt bear with me, thou wilt find the life and the truth."

And Paul washed and bound the young man's hurts, giving him ease. So, in time, a measure of strength was his, and he overcame the adversary death.

Then, one evening, when the saint was again in his company he prayed for his counsel, declaring that he was like a man who had travelled a road that led to a cliff's edge. "Master, show me

some other way," was his prayer. "Through thee I have escaped death. And now I suffer the pains of the mind and not of the body. I see no road before me. I would be guided by thy sayings. But I cannot follow the counsel of the Greek. Lo, pleasure and riches are my need, and I cannot see how any man, who seeks the life of poverty, gains aught. For riches are as an armour that protects and guards a man against the rude buffetings of the world. How can any man be virtuous when he is poor?"

Calling to mind the vain words spoken in pride by Torquatus on the slope of the olives, Paul said to him, "Men of thy kind desire but to possess the things of this world and fail to perceive that this desire is vanity and a cause of unceasing care. Whether it is fulfilled or no, its fruits are sorrow and bitterness. I have suffered the loss of all such things and I have gained immeasurably. Turn to the true way. Walk in the light of Christ. Forgive thy neighbour his trespass. Be merciful, long-suffering, and forbearing, and thus wilt thou wear an armour no sword can pierce."

And Paul stroked the sick man's brow saying, softly, "Son, image in thy mind whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are lovely and the peace that passeth understanding may yet be thine."

"I am caught as in a net," cried Torquatus. "I cannot escape." Then he spoke of the temptation that beset him in various times and seasons. "The beauty of women is to me as the fragrance of the vine-blossom. It casts a spell upon my mind, filling it with dreams."

"Such dreams are visions of the dark," answered Paul. "Let thy mind be filled with light, then there will be no place in it for evil imaginations."

"In past times when this madness came upon me," groaned Torquatus, "I have strewn the rubies and the white sapphires of Lusitania at their feet. Yea, I cheated a merchant of a fine sum in gold for this end."

Then Paul told the sick man that if his whole being were filled with the one purpose and worked for that purpose it would blot out such disordered fevers and desires, delivering him from the desire of women. "For some men it is better that they should marry than that they should burn. But thou art not of that kind. Freedom for thee can come only through faith and warfare for faith. Sin will wholly enslave thy mind." And Paul related the story of his life, telling of the long years of conflict, of how his father cursed and disowned him, of his defiance of his own race. He spoke of afflictions, floggings, shipwrecks, stonings

and always of his joy as a loyal soldier of his Master in these sufferings. Thus he lit up the bold spirit of Torquatus, causing him to cry out that he, too, would go upon this fine adventure. "Thy words cut through my bonds," was his saying. "Thou hast spoken truly. The world is a battlefield and I will follow thee and fight under thy banner."

With this thought in his mind Torquatus swiftly mended in health; and when he was whole he gathered together the youths of Corduba, compelled them to come and sit at the feet of the Seer of Tarsus, and also led them to be enlisted as soldiers in the army, as he called it, of Paul and Christ. So eager was this young nobleman he placed all his monies in the one purse that was kept for the saints. And he obtained leave of Paul to depart to Acci, his birthplace. There he would aid Crescens and cause the people in that town to follow him in this brave enterprise—the conquest of the spirit of man throughout the known world.

Howbeit, haste and zeal were not guided by prudence and wisdom. He destroyed the work of Crescens in that town. The greybeards laughed at the young man they had known as a boy; and their mockery so angered this soldier of Christ he forgot himself and insulted them and the gods of Acci, calling the gods demons and the water nymphs, in which the mob believed, evil spirits of the underworld, servants of the dread Æternium who was said by the people to rule those dark places.

They turned upon Crescens and Torquatus, and casting stones, drove them from Acci. Wherefore, though bleeding and broken, Torquatus faced his persecutors when a mile from that town, crying: "O citizens of Acci, I will return again; and when I come once more my God will show His power through me. Humbled by the signs of His might you will then cast yourselves down and worship Him only, Him, the pure, the ineffable One."

They would have torn this proud youth into many pieces if Crescens had not said unto the mob, "We are under the protection of Rome and of Cæsar. Ill befalls any man who maltreats us or lays violent hands upon our person."

It was well said, for only thus could these two have been delivered in that hour of strange anger when the rabble were as men possessed by devils.

After that time Paul forbade Torquatus to speak to the people in public. He made of him a server of the brethren, setting him ignoble tasks; and because of his respect and worship for the saint he obeyed him in all things, and travelled in his train through Gaul to Rome.

There this fiery man abode for a year or more. When he had been disciplined and learned to command himself, he returned to Hispania. And it is related that his mind was then filled with the one purpose, imaging whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are lovely.

So it came to pass that, having spoken to many of the people who were celebrating a festival to a heathen god outside the town of Acci, he declared that the sign promised by him would shortly be shown to them. Again they mocked and laughed at him. Laying hands upon his body but in no way quelling his fearless spirit, they bore him rudely enough towards the town.

It was a day of thunder and heavy rain. When a score of the rabble stood upon the great bridge of Acci there came a small quaking of the earth and the bridge fell, many were wounded or killed in that hour of terror. For the heavens opened and were filled with lightning. After that darkness spread over the skies and only lamentation and wailing were heard, and those who remained whole entreated Torquatus to stay the wrath of his powerful God.

So he conquered. And when again the sun shone and days of stillness, bearing good harvests, followed, the people hearkened eagerly to one they called "the High Priest of Christ." Wherefore Torquatus was named by the Apostles as the first bishop of Acci and was indeed the first in Hispania. Through this Bætican the greater part of that country was won for Christ.

Having established a church in Corduba Paul went to Cartago,¹ a strong city that stands upon a hill near the sea. There he abode in the season of summer and autumn, and with the aid of certain of the youths of Corduba who interpreted for him, he conversed much with the poor and the fishermen in that town. These fishermen formed a college and were men of some knowledge. So they gladly received Paul. Indeed, in that time, he spoke with men of every kind, stirring even the soul of Publius, the governor in his palace; winning also certain of the merchants with his tidings. But it was the fishermen of Cartago who never forgot Paul, remaining faithful, abiding by his words.

That was a gracious season for the ageing Apostle; and for him the years dropped away, strength being renewed before he

¹ (Carthago Nova) Cartagena.

journeyed to Tarraco;¹ and afterwards passed along the coasts of Gaul. He went north a little way and stayed for a short while at Lugdunum,² so it was not until the spring of the following year that he saw the Seven Hills of Rome again.

¹ Tarragona.

² Lyons.

BOOK II
ST. PETER AND ST. PAUL IN ROME

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was an age notable beyond all others for wealth, vice, lust and cruelty, for ascetic virtue and sublime sacrifice. It was an age when saints, demons, devils and heroes walked the earth. To win gold and power a man would betray his dearest friend, giving him up to torment and death. The father of Nero plucked out the eyes of a Roman knight and trampled a child to death with his horse's hooves in the Appian Way. The slave girls of Octavia, the Empress, suffered the torture of the rack, but even in their last agonies they would not bear false testimony against their virtuous mistress, or call her an adulteress, as her persecutors demanded.

The licence that comes with great wealth prevailed in Italy. On the lakes, on the banks of the Arno, in Campania and in the Alban hills stood the huge palaces of the nobles. These were adorned with the marbles of Phrygia and Numidia. They contained many tables of citrus that rested on pillars of ivory, gilded ceilings, ornamented with gems that were borne from the four quarters of the earth.

The palaces of the Emperor and his favourites were store-houses of the plunder of empire. Rome contained rich treasures. But despite its fine buildings the common people dwelled in narrow, twisted streets; numbers existed in hovels not fit for swine. Many of the poor lived in idleness, fed by the bread the State provided, and kept in contentment by the barbarous sports and games in which men and beasts contended. Rome was indeed the home of idleness and pleasure, a gossip-house to which were carried all the stories and scandals of the known world.

Into such a world Nero came feet first; and this manner of arrival was said to be an evil omen. In a later time the rueful prophet whispered that he was the last of the Julian House, the last of the Cæsars.

Through the murder of Claudius, her husband, Agrippina raised Nero to the throne. So on the first day of his rule he gave to the palace guard the watchword "Best of Mothers." Yet it was written in the Book of the Years that first the "best

of mothers" would be shipwrecked, then done to death through the orders of her son, and these were given at the bidding of Poppæa, the harlot.

His counsellors, Seneca and Burrhus, hailed the young Emperor as god upon earth, telling him that he was the arbiter of life, death and fortune to people, nations and cities that no man might number.

But despite the hateful deed of Agrippina and the poisoning of Britannicus, Claudius's son, at an imperial banquet, all promised well for the ship of the State with the wise Seneca as pilot and Burrhus as second man at the helm.

During the first ten years of Nero's reign no death sentence was placed on record, and only two men were banished for the offence of treason and for defaming the Emperor's name. His two ministers insisted upon purity of administration in all the twenty-five provinces. If the authorities suspected any governor of corrupt practices enquiry was swiftly made. So such men sought to walk circumspectly and strove to keep the example of Seneca's integrity ever before their eyes. Call, therefore, the first ten years of Nero's reign the years of mercy and justice. Never indeed had the Empire been so wisely ruled.

When Paul could not obtain a fair hearing from his own nation, persecuted and maligned he appealed to Rome and secured the charter of freedom for himself, his brethren and the Church from the Prefect of the Imperial Court.

Nero had seen but seventeen summers when he came to the throne, and while still a youth he showed himself to be sound and far-seeing in his judgments. He even devised a plan whereby the taxes on trading should be removed, giving free commerce between the different provinces of the Empire, but he discovered that he had not the power to enforce this dream which, assuredly, would have knit them all together.

Nevertheless, in judging Nero, it is well to remember that within him were two beings—a wise-minded man and a demon; the one or the other ruled according to the company that was about him.¹ When a youth he hearkened to Seneca, and at times regarded him as a well-beloved father. Then was his mind filled with wisdom; but the monster of cruelty that lay coiled up within his nature would on occasions strike low those whom he feared of the Royal House, or those who offended his vanity.

Two people, Tigellinus and Poppæa, appealed unceasingly to

¹ Note the symbolic reference to the "Dragons" in the Mystery-visions of Symphorus.

the evil within him, and at last the darkness of his soul overcame the light. Evil triumphed and years of terror followed years of murders, slayings and executions, the great fire and the season of frightful torture for the saints in Rome.

Burrhus had died two years or more before the fire. And perceiving that he could no longer guide the Emperor, Seneca, despite his master's entreaties, sought a close retirement in his house at Rome. He told his friends that he was weary of the world and, desiring to pass his days in study and contemplation, he could no longer undertake the burden of the cares of State.

But it was another reason that led the sage to surrender up his lofty place as second citizen of Rome. He had listened to Nero, heard him boast of his new philosophy which declared that the life of self-indulgence was the life of virtue, that the wise man should seek only his own pleasure, and sin and evil living should from henceforth be his rule of conduct.

Seneca perceived that Tigellinus had sown this belief in the heart of the Emperor, and knowing that naught would uproot it, he departed from the council chamber rejecting his master's request that he should remain. For he would not in any way be answerable for the deeds of darkness that must be committed by an emperor who listened only to the advice of a profligate.

It was Tigellinus and not Poppæa who changed the soul of Nero and thus led him to ruin and a miserable end.

When, therefore, Paul was journeying to Rome, Seneca was no longer in authority. Tigellinus ruled Cæsar through devising for him all manner of licentious pleasures and through flattering his vanity by hailing him as a god of poetry, a veritable Apollo with his lyre.

CHAPTER XIX

NOW as Poppæa was the woman of evil, Pomponia Græcina¹ was the woman of sorrow. Her father, a prince of Britannia, had in past times offended the Romans, so his young daughter was captured and taken to Rome. Later the Emperor pardoned the prince; for false accusations had been made against him. He had been tortured by the Romans and did not live long after his lands had been restored to him.

While her father still lay in bonds Pomponia was sheltered by an ancient Roman family; and the eldest son of the house, Plautius, looked upon her and loved her. He was a just man and desired to take her to wife. Wherefore his kin were incensed against him, but he would not yield. They did not consider it fitting that a Roman general should marry a woman from Britannia. But when the Emperor made restitution to her father he married this girl who was strangely unlike the Roman women. For she was fair as the yellow cornfields in the season of harvest, and her cheeks held in them the soft bloom of the flowers. So Plautius rejoiced in his love and had his wife instructed by men of learning. He would make her a companion to him in the things of the mind. And in that first season after marriage theirs was a perfect love.

He served the Emperor in the provinces and at his court. In their youth the young couple were without care, joining in the revelry and pleasures of the nobles. But they were not corrupted; they committed no evil. Plautius went not after strange women and Pomponia lived only for her husband. Hers was a

¹ Tacitus (Annals xiii. 52) referring to the year 257 says: "Pomponia Græcina, a distinguished lady, wife of the Plautius who returned from Britain with an ovation, was accused of some foreign superstition and handed over to her husband's judicial decision. Following ancient precedent, he heard his wife's cause in the presence of kinsfolk, inviting, as it did, her legal status and character, and he reported that she was innocent. This Pomponia lived a long life of unbroken melancholy. After the murder of Julia, Drusus' daughter, by Messalina's treachery, for forty years she wore only the attire of a mourner with her heart ever sorrowful. For this, during Claudius' reign, she escaped unpunished, and it was afterwards counted a glory to her."

This is the only notice of her in ancient literature. De Rom (*Rome Sotteranea*, ii. 360-64) would identify her with S. Lucina, she having adopted that name at her baptism. See also W. R. Brownlow and J. S. Northcote's *Rome Sotteranea* (1869), pp. 40, 124, etc.

deep and tender soul. She loved her children and her kin, but made no friends among the Romans. For they disliked her coldness and purity.

There came a time when she knew the bitterness of death and parting. Her three children perished in their early years—the last dying of the pestilence that oft-times visited Rome. Then their mother was distraught with grief, for Plautius desired above all else that his name should be continued through the generations.

He became silent, cold and stern, withdrawing into himself. And his wife suffered much because of this change in him and because she knew that she would bear no more children. In her trouble she sought the consolations that might be offered by the worship of the gods. But soon the practices connected with such worship sickened her, inasmuch as the priests of Isis and Serapis sought to live with those women who came often to the rites celebrated in their temples. And one among them declared that such licence was demanded by the god or goddess he served. Pomponia was lovely in his sight, and so he lusted after her and maintained that she would not be unfaithful to her husband if she secretly yielded to the god by yielding to his desire.

Then Pomponia turned her face away from these gods. Being pure of heart she could not hold with such abominable and secret practices. But her husband still gave her no comfort; he remained gathered into himself.

For her it was a time of despair when Rome seemed only to contain cruelty, lust and loneliness. It is true that the Stoics were men of virtue, but they bade their listeners depend only on themselves, leading the noble life, not hoping for reward or for anything but eternity of silence and sleep in the world beyond the grave. But their doctrine, though it was in part fine and lofty, could not win or in any way comfort Pomponia. Neglected by her husband and thrown in on herself she yearned for her small son and could not bear to imagine that he was blotted out, that there would be no meeting with him in some future time after release from the body.

When Priscilla and Aquila returned to Rome from Ephesus they encountered this noble matron, for being of good family Priscilla¹ could seek out the patrician women who were of a serious mind and cared not for follies and pleasures of the world. And Pomponia hearkened eagerly when she spoke of Christ, setting

¹ Acts xviii. 2; Romans xvi. 3; II Cor. xvi. 19; II Tim. iv. 19.

forth His teachings and relating how He had conquered death, rising on the third day and appearing to His disciples. She gave assurance to the sorrowing mother that her son still lived, and would meet her again after the darkness and bewilderment of this world had passed away.

Now life was wholly changed. Pomponia went happily all the day. Soon Plautius became aware of this change. Because of her gladness and through it the renewal of her youth and beauty, he came out of his silence, his sternness melting, he looked upon his wife and loved her once more.

In time he became curious and asked how it was that her mood of deep melancholy had become one of joy and contentment. Foolishly, then, she spoke of a new god and declared that those worshipped by the Romans were evil.

Then Plautius was troubled, fearing lest his wife might give offence if she spoke of this belief of hers to others. She had even declared that Christ was greater than Augustus, and that this Christ, who had died the death of a malefactor, was God, whereas the Emperor was a mortal man. Veritably Pomponia spoke unwarily. She had not yet learned how to be circumspect when speaking of the new truths which made all things lovely in her sight once more.

Now Flavia, the sister of Plautius, despised and hated her brother's wife, calling her "the proud barbarian." Flavia ill-treated her slave girls, causing one to be flogged for having, through an evil chance, broken her necklet of pearls. Pomponia had reproached her sister-in-law for this cruelty, saying that the slave girl was also a woman and, therefore, her mistress should do to her only what she would have done to herself.

So there was division between these two women. In other matters also, Flavia knew that "the proud barbarian," though silent, disliked and condemned her way of life—the many hundreds of gold pieces she spent on jewellery, perfumes and various follies. So she sought maliciously to do her hurt, and for this purpose had won the trust and confidence of her brother.

He went straight from Pomponia to Flavia's house and told her of the blasphemy that had been uttered by his wife against Augustus and the gods. It is true that Flavia beguiled his understanding, and he had come to her in the heat of anger and fear. Afterwards it seemed to him that he had erred. But in that hour, led by Flavia, he went to his father, and the two declared this tale to the ancient patrician.

To the old man who had been reared in the worship of Rome

and of Augustus, it seemed that Pomponia had committed a grievous sin that could not be forgiven unless she made confession, offered sacrifices to the Emperor-God and put from her this foreign superstition. So he commanded that she should be brought before the tribunal of the family—true Romans all, stern in virtue, unswerving in their worship of Augustus and the State.

They spoke harshly to Pomponia, accusing her of having shamed her husband, and she was sentenced to imprisonment for the rest of her life in a lonely place in the hills. And Pomponia wept, for she knew that she would lose Plautius whom she so dearly loved and would soon perish miserably.

Wherefore she denied Christ and was compelled to declare Him to be one of the lesser gods and to recognize Rome and Augustus as the only objects of her worship. Then the family forgave her, but the old patrician declared that she must retire for a season to her husband's house in the Alban hills.

Howbeit, Flavia rested not. Desiring to sever husband and wife from one another, she visited Pomponia when she was in retirement and told her that it was Plautius who had betrayed her, giving her up to the family tribunal. When Pomponia taxed him with this charge he could not deny it. But being ashamed of having in his anger betrayed her, he spoke hard words, striving to justify himself and silence the uneasy reproaches of his soul.

Thus Flavia succeeded in severing these two who had so greatly loved one another, and the happenings of the time aided her in this work of malice. For a mighty rage swept across Britannia when Bouddica,¹ their princess, was insulted and scourged by the Romans. In thousands the Britons gathered together, making assault upon the towns and the homes of the strangers who dwelled in their lands. Many score of Romans perished at the stake, on the gibbet and on the cross; for they were taken unawares by the barbarians. In time, however, they had their revenge; the legions conquered the Britons, quelling their revolt.

The kin of Pomponia had served Bouddica, and many were slain by their conquerors. Their rebellion and death for treason came as a second shame, hardening the heart of Plautius and breaking his wife's heart.

Then indeed she dwelled alone, beset by terrors, fearing her husband because of his fierce, dumb mien, fearing lest her brother, who was in hiding in Gaul, would be taken and tortured by the Romans, fearing more than all else the fruits of her dishonour. She

¹ Boadicea.

deemed that she had destroyed her soul by denying Christ before the family tribunal.

And so for Pomponia there was no peace day or night. She was guarded by two women and a servant of the patrician family. Though on her return to Rome she might come and go freely she was always watched, and her husband forbade her to have intercourse with Priscilla or any of the other saints.

In her hour of desolation that one comfort and consolation was withheld from her. Wherefore she withdrew wholly, seeing no one save Plautius and his slaves.

Always now he treated her as if she had brought dishonour on his name. And he, who had betrayed her, made it seem that she, who had only been unwary in her speech, was the betrayer, the robber of his happiness and his pleasure in life.

She might, indeed, have made an end by taking poison if it had not been for a slave girl who came to serve her as a tire-woman in that season. This Hebrew was named Mary and was a Christian, who in time discovered her faith to her mistress.

CHAPTER XX

PLAUTIUS possessed a villa that stood on the borders of a lake in northern Italy. He went there with his wife when Paul was journeying from Spain to Gaul. Hard by the house was the Temple of the River-god and a seat of ancient augury. And the stern Roman compelled Pomponia to pay homage to the god, who, in her belief, was but the froward spirit of the lake. A stream flowed down from the hills. Upon it travelled slow-moving barges beneath groves of ash and poplar trees. Little boats and white swans floated upon the lake. All things seemed peaceful. No man hurried in that rich land of mellow sunshine.

It was the season of autumn when the country folk danced the dance of the vintage. They made music, playing upon flutes; they drank the new wine and were glad.

But Pomponia was not glad. Here in harvest time she had come with Plautius in the first days after their marriage. The woods, the blue waters, recalled to her remembrance those lovely hours that now had passed and perished as the withered leaves, and they could return no more. For they belonged to her youth when she knew not the sorrow of death, the fear of eternity, or the grief when a soul changes, becoming hard as the rocks of the hills. And in her husband she had perceived that change, so that though he remained at her side he was as a stranger, as some other man who had entered with force and violence into her life.

Yet remembrance of their early life would not have in such great measure caused her to suffer this if she had not been guilty of what in her heart she knew was a betrayal of Christ. So she feared the future, believing that, because of her sin, she would be separated for ever from her son in the world beyond the tomb.

In a little while Mary the tire-woman, through speaking of her delight in her own faith, learned of the sorrow that tormented her mistress, and she declared her mind concerning it, saying:

"There is only one man who can unravel thy perplexity, and that man is Paul of Tarsus. He offended grievously against Christ yet was pardoned and saw the Master and conversed with Him. And because of this he, Paul, the Seer, will be able to tell thee

whether thou canst make reparation, and obtain pardon, as he did, for thine offence."

Pomponia was a little comforted by the words of her tirewoman who communicated privily with the brethren in Rome, asking tidings concerning Paul of Tarsus. And soon she learned that he was in Tarraconensis, was departing from Spain and coming by way of Gaul to Rome. But when in that city Pomponia was straitly watched and guarded, and therefore might not, on peril of her life and loss of Plautius, meet and converse with the saints.

But soon came tidings that swept all these perplexities from her mind. She learned that her brother Lucius lay sick unto death at Lugdunum.¹ He was in hiding and had taken a Roman name inasmuch as it was still remembered that he had, in Britannia, rebelled against Cæsar and fought against his legions in the service of Bouddica.

Yearning to see this brother, Pomponia spoke to Plautius; for the first time for many seasons opening her heart to him. "I have submitted myself to thee and to thy family," she said proudly; "and thus I humbled myself for the sake of our dead son, for the sake of the love that gave him to us, the love that has since died between us. Wherefore in the name of those early days when we lived upon the borders of the lake I entreat thee to permit me to journey into Gaul so that I may look once more upon my brother before he passes hence into the shadows."

Being at the villa and removed from the influence of his family, Plautius softened. He remembered those happy days when his young wife's companionship gave him greater joy than any that came from victories he had won for Claudius in Britannia. So he yielded to her, saying sadly, "Thou hast been a good wife to me and I have mayhap erred against thee. For the increase of the years hardens the mind. Thou shalt journey into Gaul as is thy desire, and I will seek out Cæsar and petition him to pardon thy brother."

Now this was a brave saying, for Plautius might well draw upon him the displeasure of Nero in asking this favour in a time when the Emperor had grown fearful of treason and of those who had plotted rebellion against his authority. Wherefore Pomponia thanked him, and for a brief hour the old happiness returned; these two as they gazed out upon the peaceful lake were almost as one in heart.

On the morrow they parted—Plautius journeying southwards

¹ Lyons.

and his wife and her maid travelling west into Gaul, and then north to Lugdunum.

She found her brother lying in a mean hovel in that town. Sickness and hunger had so ravaged his face it was like yellow marble. She had him taken to her own place where she believed that, through her care, he might be saved from the menacing shadows. But in no way did he mend; and there came a day when she learned from his physicians that he was dying.

Now Mary had gone into the town, and she perceived three travellers, two strong and upstanding, one lame and crooked of body. Looking upon them her heart rejoiced, for she perceived Paul of Tarsus. She went quickly to him, declaring herself to be of his children in Rome. Swiftly was her story told, and though weary after his journey the saint could not refuse her entreaty that he should come on the instant to the bedside of the sick man. "For verily, master," she cried; "thou wilt heal him. Working through thee the Holy Spirit has never failed."

It was a strange meeting when the patrician woman of Britannia encountered the white-haired Seer of Judæa. She knelt before him asking his blessing; hardly could she utter the words, such eagerness possessed her soul.

And perceiving her grief the saint spoke tenderly to her, promising to surrender his whole being to the work of saving her brother, Lucius.

In a dim chamber sheltered from the sun's rays he lay tossing to and fro. Soon he was quieted by the presence of the saint. There came a smile upon his face as he saw the fair mist that gathered about the old man while he prayed.

Watching them Pomponia became filled with hope, believing that this master, who had cured many, would assuredly heal her brother. But Paul was spent after his long journey. He strove vainly against the gathering darkness. He cried to his Master entreating Him to send the Holy Spirit, but his body failed him. In his weakness he could not draw the power that never fails.

The sick man struggled for breath and life. Then his face twisted up and blood flowed from his mouth. Soon he lay still, unstirring as a bird in its nest.

CHAPTER XXI

THE Apostle and the stricken woman looked at each other across the body of the dead man. Awful was the silence between them. Her eyes were cold and hard as blue gems; there was no faith or hope in them.

For the first time in all his long years Paul could not give gaze for gaze. His eyes fell, and bowing his head he prayed with all his might for the strength and power that had been withheld. And suddenly she reproached him, saying:

"Could not Paul, who hath healed many, have caused even that my brother should not have died?"

The saint sought to answer her; but no words came. He bowed his head and prayed again.

"Where hath he gone?" she cried. "Into what shadows, into what night?"

"Even for such," said Paul, "there is mercy. For he hath not denied Christ—not having known Him."

Pomponia walked to and fro wringing her hands, her eyes hard and bitter, shedding no tears.

In the mind of Paul Pomponia was as Rachel mourning for her children and would not be comforted. But his saying that Lucius had not denied Christ was as the stroke of a spear, smiting at the very life of her soul.

The evening gathered; darkness thickened. Mary knocked upon the door, and coming within set three torches in the midmost part of that chamber of the dead, then silently withdrew.

With the coming of these three flames light also came to the saint. He bade Pomponia sit at his feet and hearken to him; and when he spoke in the voice of authority few could disobey his command. Despite the reproach uttered, despite her despair she came to him and sat in the lowly place as she had been bidden.

Then he said tenderly that it was well that Lucius had not lived, for now he was at peace. The world from henceforth could have offered him no peace. He would only have been hunted and harried, and at last taken by the Romans, perishing in torment.

"No tidings were ever borne to him of Christ," continued Paul; "and for him there will, therefore, be no darkness in the life to come. Be not afeared, sister. He sleeps soundly and he sleeps well; and I know from what I have learned of his life of integrity that, despite his ignorance, he will not be among the lost in the great last Day of Judgment."

And Paul spoke other tender words, his compassion overflowing. So her grief abated, and in a little while she was no longer as one distraught. Suffering Mary in all quietness to lead her from that chamber, she looked no more upon the dead.

After the burial of Lucius Paul came again and yet again to the house where dwelled Pomponia Græcina. For a long time he could not penetrate the defences of her mind. But at last he learned of that secret fear that lay hidden within her as a kernel within a nut. And she said unto him, "Mary hath declared that it is thy command that wives should obey their husbands. Wherefore, in denying Christ, I fulfilled to the letter thine ordinance concerning women."

Then Paul was somewhat perplexed. After a silence he made answer: "Yea, such were my words. But the husband should obey God. Wherefore I would counsel thee to be in subjection to thy husband, and in all humbleness win him by thy conversation to a belief in the risen Master. If in this matter thou dost succeed then indeed is thy salvation assured."

"And if I fail," she asked, "what then? Must I continue to obey him and keep apart from the believers in Rome? I would worship in their company. I would be consoled by their sayings and their knowledge of this Mystery of the God Jesus."

"Yea, abide by the command of thy husband," said Paul. "Seek not out the brethren. Thou art as a lone sentinel at his post, far from his comrades. Yet thou wilt render true service, remaining faithful. And be silent in the presence of thy husband's family concerning Christ. So long as thou dost not deny Him in thy heart, so long as thou dost seek to live according to His light, thou wilt be among those who are saved and of the elect."

Pomponia was comforted by these words. She had dwelled in the region of terrors and then in the region of death, and therein she found peace. The Apostle's failure to heal her brother had led her to discover his deep tenderness, his com-

passion which was the veritable flowering of his soul. The Paul who spoke to the multitude would not have moved her or strengthened her faith. The Paul of authority and the one who, from fear of women, held back from them, would have caused her also to fail and doubt. But his noble pity, and his forgetfulness, through that pity, of this other, sterner Paul, won her wholly; so that she opened her heart to him in all things, and one day spoke of a new dream that had been conjured up in her imagination through his presence in her life.

"I pray thee, master, seek out my own people in Britannia. Abide no more among these froward and corrupt Romans. Truly they are for the most part hard as the stones, yea, even harder. For I am told the very stones cried out when they tortured my kin in the time they were captured near Londinium. I pray thee change thy design. Go not southward. Journey north through Gaul. Take ship then and cross the small piece of water that lies between Gaul and the coasts of my own country.

"Verily the Britons are an honest and simple people. It is true that in war—like all nations—they practise cruelties, but they live not corruptly like the Romans. They are true of heart, their word their bond, they are steadfast in their loyalty to their chief. Let Christ be raised as Chief among them and the whole nation will render Him homage and fealty. Yea, they will conquer the whole world for Him. Not by force of arms but through their steadfastness and faith which hath already been shown in the manner in which they followed and served the royal princess Boudicca.

"There is no steadfastness in the Romans. They only covet gold and power, betraying one another in order to win riches and the pleasures wealth can bestow on them. But the Britons are simple, country folk who place Chief and the honour of their Chief first and their own good last.

"The shepherds will fold their flocks and follow thee. The husbandman will cast aside his spade and hearken to thy words. Yea, all the people, gentle and simple, must delight in thy sayings. For they possess the lore of the hills and valleys and have none of the evil knowledge of townsmen; and also they are an oppressed people, their spirit broken since their revolt against the Romans."

Of a sudden Pomponia ceased speaking, gazing at Paul and Aristarchus, but she could not read their minds so she continued, saying: "The Britons are like unto thy people, the Jews. They

are of a more ancient race, of a finer spirit and temper of soul than their conquerors. But my countrymen dwell in the darkness of a barbarian ignorance."

And lo, as she uttered these words Paul's imagination was kindled and swiftly he answered her plea. "Yea, thine is a fine vision. It may well be that at some future time the Britons and the Jews will make an alliance together, bearing to all men the Light that is everlasting. For being simple and unlearned thy people will, peradventure, become the wisest in their generation if they are chosen. And verily they shall be chosen. Aristarchus, I go not south to Rome. Our design for the coming year is changed. I shall journey north to Britannia. This people of the island of mist and cold is my people; and I shall not rest until I have traversed the whole country, speaking and giving tidings—until, indeed, I have penetrated into its farthest corners."

Then Pomponia was glad, promising to give him letters, and to present him with a purse of money for his journeys. And they communed together concerning Verulamium, Londinium, Wroxcester¹ and other places in Britannia and the various tribes that abode in that land; and so many were they, they were like the tribes of Israel.

When all had been put in order in Paul's mind concerning the manner of his conquest of Britannia, Aristarchus said, "Master, there is one thing thou hast forgotten. Thou hast no knowledge of the tongue of the Britons. Surely few will have understanding of the Latin speech. And even if some among them can follow thy sayings thou wilt not win their hearts unless thou canst speak to them in their own language."

Then the old man became troubled, but he made answer, "I can study their speech, and in two or three seasons become acquainted with it."

And gazing upon the bowed body of the aged Apostle and counting the many wrinkles on his brow, Aristarchus shook his head sadly, saying, "Nay, it is a strange and twisted speech and not like unto Latin, Greek or Hebrew. It will be a long time before thou canst converse smoothly in it. But I have already knowledge of it. For in these last years when we were in Rome I came and went, as thou knowest, in the household of the prince, Aristobulus;² and his slaves were for the most part of Britannia. They became members of our Church because I rested not until I had learned how to speak with them in their

¹ "North and west of Londinium," see appendix.

² Romans xvi. 10.

own tongue. For that is the way to the heart of a simple people who are far from their own land, living in lonely exile. Wherefore, I prithee suffer me to journey to Britannia. My mind already contains the image of this country—of its forests, of its flowing hills and valleys, its mountains on the west and north. In truth I am acquainted with this people, and I yearn to go hence and dwell among them.”

Sorrowfully Paul consented that Aristarchus should journey in his stead to Britannia. For the saint liked not to relinquish his purpose which was to travel to the farthest borders of the known world where, it was said, the earth ends, the sky meeting and mingling with it.

Howbeit, it was not until a later season that Aristarchus set out northwards. He journeyed back to Rome in the company of Paul; for he would speak first with Aristobulus who was of the Herodian house. He was a member of the Church and desired to go on some fine adventure. Being a prince he was powerful and could obtain letters that would aid the travellers on their journey.

So it came to pass that some years later Aristobulus and Aristarchus went north, and they were on the coasts of Gaul seeking a ship to carry them to the island of the Britons in the time of Paul's second imprisonment in Rome.

Now Plautius came suddenly to Lugdunum and he told Pomponia that Nero had refused to grant the favour of her brother's life and liberty. Indeed orders were despatched for his taking; and he was to be carried to Rome and tried there for treason, his end being assuredly ignominious death by torture.

“Mercifully he hath escaped,” said Pomponia; “and he is gone to a place that is beyond Roman justice.”

Then Plautius wrung his hands, crying out, “We are undone. Thy pestilent people will ruin us. We shall be accused of having conspired to bring about thy brother's escape and we are, therefore, open to a charge of plotting with Cæsar's enemies.”

And Pomponia made cold answer, “Be not afraid of my pestilent people. My brother, Lucius, is dead. My God delivered him thus out of the hands of the Roman judges. He is beyond their malice and their cruel torment.”

Then Plautius became silent, being angered by the manner of her speech, though glad that he could not be accused of treason. But his heart closed against his wife once more, and he refused her entreaty that she should speak with Paul of Tarsus.

Fearing more trouble for himself, he caused her instantly to depart from Gaul and compelled her for a long while to dwell in the villa by the lake, only suffering her to return to Rome a year later in the time the first anger against the Britons had been spent.

So, though her husband was with her at certain seasons, coming and going to his house on the lake, Pomponia was much alone and often cast down. But she was comforted when she remembered that Paul likened her to a sentinel at an outpost and when she learned privily that Aristobulus and Aristarchus were planning the conversion of her own people—for which she so ardently longed.

CHAPTER XXII

IT was in the early spring yet still it seemed to be winter, when Paul came again to Rome, and he was glad of heart to be amongst the Roman brethren once more. Peter had been before him, had counted and blessed the members of the Church of which Linus was Overseer. Howbeit, Peter was away in the country to the north when Paul once more set foot in the city of the Cæsars.

Now Linus eagerly spoke of the text of the letters dispatched to Spain that told him that the word of Christ had been heard even within the court of the Emperor. Certain slaves of his body-guard and one freedman came secretly to worship and were baptized. It seemed indeed as if not only the poor and the slaves but the nobles might in time learn of Christ. And Linus presented Narcissus¹ to the saint one summer evening saying, "He beareth tidings of import for us and all the saints."

Now this young man spoke in haste declaring first his steadfast belief in the doctrine taught by Paul and then saying that he desired to serve Christ to the uttermost. Wherefore he had spoken of these things to a woman who was in high favour with Nero and she had hearkened to him. "I may not declare the name of this lady, but she is weary of the world and greatly yearns to have tidings of another and of the Lighted House of the Father. So I promised to lead thee to her."

And when Paul showed no great wish to speak with this woman, Narcissus became the more urgent, crying, "She hath the ear of Cæsar. She will persuade him to believe in Christ if thou dost convince her of the truth. Verily, a mighty work may be wrought in this hour. So I pray thee, master, scorn her not but come with me on the instant, and thou shalt perceive that I am no vain babbler."

So Paul followed Narcissus through the dusky streets of Rome and presently he found himself within a house that was guarded and stood apart from others, and he was swiftly led into the chamber wherein Nero's favourite awaited him.

¹ Romans xvi. 11.

She was alone and rested on a couch. Looking upon her Paul perceived fine raiment, jewels and the painted cheeks of the harlot, but her eyes held ancient knowledge. So Paul conducted himself warily, striving to lead her to declare her mind.

She spoke comfortable words and soon distrust went from him, and he opened his heart to her, speaking of his desire to make the Church of the Master the Church of the Empire, with branches in each of the provinces, of which there were twenty-five.

Now this blonde woman of the East led Paul to believe that he had convinced her of the truth of what he said. So when at last he ended his discourse and prayed her to come to worship and to be prepared for baptism, she raised herself upon the couch, her manner swiftly changing and her speech striking through his soul like some withering blast.

"Master," she said softly, "I know thy works and I have long desired to see thee in the flesh. Thou hast been brave and honest in thy speech, so will I be honest and declare myself to thee. I am Poppæa, in part one of thine own race,¹ and I have been told that thou wert like unto a dog that goeth about the world making much noise, or like a snake that lieth in the grass. Now I know that thou hast neither the littleness nor venom of the beast or the snake. I esteem and admire in thee a greatness which also I fear. For, Paul, thou art the very spirit of evil. Thou art, in truth, the eternal enemy of our race. I speak out of foreknowledge, that strange gift bestowed upon me at my birth. Because I perceive the design of the years and know that thy teachings will work much evil upon Israel and will bear suffering to all my kin and tribe, so I shall strive against thee, and will, if thou dost continue in thy course, see that thy people and brethren are harried and destroyed.

"Howsoever, if thou wilt leave Rome I may, peradventure, not seek thy hurt for I fear only when thou art in this city. Now, we two who are enemies may, here and now, because we are great spirits, make peace with one another. Wherefore, on the morrow thou mayest through Narcissus send me an answer. Let him bear tidings to me of thy departure from Rome for the east and for Judæa and I will not seek to work any evil but will hold my peace. Know that all that passes between us is secret and may not be declared. If it is spoken, then will thou and thy brethren instantly perish."

For a space there was silence, Paul being gathered into himself.

¹ "She was proud to call herself one of God's people so she forgot that half that was Gentile when speaking with a Hebrew."

And as he paced to and fro with bent head, he read her mind and perceived the snare that was laid in his path. She served the High Priest and the Pharisees at Jerusalem. They greatly desired his presence in Judæa. For, once there, he might easily and secretly be slain by the Sicarii who had, in these latter days, greatly increased in numbers and in might. So the saint made careful answer.

"Lady, I will send word unto thee on the morrow. Be assured that I come not to my race or to thee as an enemy, for I am the servant of Christ, wherefore I bear only the message of His love for all men."

"So thou sayest," she made answer. "But I have learned that there is torment and cruelty in the heart of the bearer of love. Verily, love persecuteth, love may indeed bear all manner of evil to men. No, master, seek not to win me. We are enemies. Only I would have thee know the truth and offer to thee, because of thine age and fine spirit, a way of escape."

Then Paul went from her presence. On that evening he was troubled in his soul by the sayings of this woman of the East. Wherefore, he slept not but prayed, and in a little while the wind of the Holy Spirit folded him in its wings and he knew peace and surety and that, on the morrow, the right way would be shown to him.

And it was so. For when morning came Linus bore tidings of the presence of Peter in Rome and that he would shortly come and hold counsel with the saint.

CHAPTER XXIII

A WIND blew out of the north on that morning when the two Apostles encountered one another in Cæsar's city.

The sky was overcast, and Paul sat beside a brazier, sensible of his infirmities and his age in that bleak hour. But when Peter came into the room that was high up above the noisy street, all things changed for him. Forgetting his infirmities he rose, and taking the Apostle's hands, saluted his kinsman in Christ with a holy kiss. These two were moved past speech as they gazed at one another; and softly, silently, Luke, Stachys, Amplias, and Urbane¹ withdrew, leaving them alone together.

Now Peter was stout and full-bodied and like a burly oak while Paul was lean and bowed as a wind-twisted birch. Yet despite his meagre stature he might well have been named the warrior-saint, whereas Peter, who had the strong build of the soldier, should ever be known as the saint of peace.

In past years his desire to keep the peace, whatever the price of it, had led him into troubled ways, had caused him in a far time at Antioch² to seem to fail Paul, to desert the brother of Tarsus though only for a brief while. He, Peter, had then called himself "The Apostle of the Jews," meaning thereby that he would only speak and preach among his own people; for if he went freely among the Gentiles he knew it would be needful that he should break the Law of Moses, or at least not compel the Gentile saints to observe the Law.

For a brief while there was division between him and Paul who would not in any way bind the Gentiles according to Hebrew ordinances. For he knew that then they would not be won for Christ.

Howbeit, the rift between these two Apostles was closed. But since that time Peter had been in a measure circumspect, visiting only the Jews in Babylonia; and when he was in Pontus he remained straitly with the people of his own race, fearing to give offence, to rouse the wrath of the Jews and to be a cause of turbulence and disorder. So seeking, he went carefully, softly,

¹ Romans xvi. 8, 9.

² Galatians ii. 11.

whereas Paul was a cause of tumult and riot in almost every city that he visited.

So it came to pass that Paul built up a great church and founded many communities through much warfare, and Peter as he now declared had, through ever observing peace and not offending in word or deed, persuaded only a few to believe in Christ, and these among the Jews outside Judæa.

At length he came to hold with Paul's larger vision; and the last time he was at Jerusalem he had told James that he would follow the example of Paul of Tarsus and make the Greeks and Romans as much his people as the Jews. Then James bade him no more return to Judæa else he would rouse up strife and mayhap cause the Sicarii to slay the saints at Jerusalem. So sorrowfully at Cæsarea Peter bade farewell to his own land, knowing that for him there would be no return. Then he journeyed to Corinth and much good work was wrought by him in that city. By reason of his gentleness of speech he caused enemies to become friends; he removed jealousies, hatreds and the spirit of division.

But now these two ageing men did not speak of their own histories when they faced one another after the separation of years. A grave sorrow lay between them, and their speech was slow and broken by their grief.

"Thou wast not at Jerusalem?" asked Paul.

"Nay, I abode in Pontus."

"And his last words to thee?"

"Were sorrowful. For I would not follow his road. I chose to follow thine—the road to the Gentiles. But if I had known . . ."

"If thou hadst known?"

"I would liefer have perished by his side."

"Nay, thy work is here in Rome."

And Peter cried out his bitterness. "I deserted James in the hour of his need even as I deserted my Master. But this time it was because I believed that thine was the greater work, the finer vision."

"Verily, then, thou didst obey the call of the Spirit; so thou hast not denied our brother who is asleep in Christ. Thou art now the head of the Church. Without thee to guide it the Church will founder in the quicksands and treacherous currents of these times. Thou art the captain of the ship; I am but its pilot."

Then Paul spoke further comforting words. And in a little while when Peter had mastered his grief, he told of the last

days of James, the Just, the chief of the Apostles, the keeper of Israel's faith.

"As thou knowest, Festus, the Roman governor, died in the year that is past. His death came with great suddenness, and for a season there was no procurator to administer Roman justice in Judæa. Agrippa had appointed Annas as high priest, and truly this was an evil choice. For Annas has always and ever hated James because of his righteousness, his high integrity. Also even those of our countrymen who do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah, loved and revered James. His long prayers in the Temple, his holy life, were held by upright Pharisees and Sadducees, yea and even by the Scribes, to be an example to our race, and as a beacon that ever gave glory by its light to the Temple of Zion. Now Annas's narrow, twisted soul could not abide that light. So he devised charges against James and showed them privily to the Sanhedrin. These declared that the Just One was a base schemer who plotted to stir up the Romans so that they would make war upon the faith of our fathers, seizing and plundering the Temple at Jerusalem. For his proof, Paul, Annas presented to these elders the history of thy life. He maintained that thy father had cursed and disowned thee for being a renegade from Israel; that thou wert the chief conspirator and James's emissary at Rome. He knew in his heart that this was a false saying; but verily he believed that thou wert plotting the overthrow of Israel. A Pharisee, whose name I may not declare, told me these things, so I have them on good authority.

"All these charges were not made at the trial of James. They were set down on a roll that was, before the taking of James, passed from one elder to another of the Sanhedrin. So blame them not if they were roused to wrath, if they in their fury gave no fair trial, but in the space of an hour passed sentence of death upon the one who was ever pure and undefiled.

"In vain James spoke of the testimony of his life, of his works for Israel, of his daily witness in the Temple, of his strict observance of the law of Moses. These elders shouted and bawled at him, they would not hearken to his pleading and defence. Festus being dead no procurator abode in Jerusalem in that season. There was no Roman who had authority enough to stay their hand. They hurried James forth from Jerusalem, and then, as is well known, they stoned him until he was dead. Merciful was that death; for the rage of the mob led to his swift end.¹ Until evening his body lay there upon the stones, and when dark-

¹ A.D. 63.

ness fell and our brethren came to remove it for burial, dogs were devouring that holy flesh." Here Peter was silent for a space, his grief again overmastering him.

And Paul whispered, "I knew not the true happening. For these things may not be set down in letters. It was when I came to Lugdunum in Gaul that I learned that James, who ever kept the letter and the spirit of the Law of Moses, was put to death by those who revered that Law."

"They were afraid," answered Peter; "they believed in their heart the tale told them by Annas. And fearing, therefore, a base betrayal of the Temple they sinned veritably in ignorance."

"Yea," said Paul; "in ignorance. So we may not judge. God alone will judge them for this offence."

"Already Annas has suffered; for great was the evil wrought by him. In the days after the passing of James the Sicarii slew many of the saints, falling upon them secretly at night. Nay more, Annas caused others, who were not of our community, to be slain. Thus it came to pass that certain of the elders of the Sanhedrin turned against Annas and entreated Agrippa to remove him from the place of the High Priest; and this was accomplished before Albinus, the procurator appointed by Cæsar, entered Jerusalem and assumed authority."

Having ended his chronicle, Peter said to Paul: "But now, brother, I would follow thee, hail thee as my master and be guided by thy sayings. For I like well thy design of a Church that will bear salvation to all people, nations and tribes. It is a dream that may, peradventure, be fulfilled, if not through our labours then through the labours of others. Let me, therefore, be the servant and look upon thee as master and as head of the Church."

Paul was moved by the humility of the one whom he ever regarded as the foremost among the Apostles. "Nay," he made answer; "thou art first, and in thy presence I am verily last. Thou art the leader in this city and I am thy follower."

And when Peter would dispute this saying Paul told him of his meeting with Poppæa, the Empress. "I went unto her, knowing no more than that she was some woman Cæsar favoured. I was not in any way prepared for this encounter. So I am troubled lest I failed my Master in that hour."

Having considered all that the saint had told him concerning the menaces of this harlot, Peter made answer, "Thou hast not failed. Thou couldst not change this woman's heart. Verily I fear her with a great fear—not for myself, but for thee. To-day

as yesterday it is commonly declared in Jerusalem that thou art the tool of the Romans, the curse that comes at night, that bears ruin to our own people by subtle devices. Poppæa is but the mouthpiece of the high priest who followed Annas. They find in her one who will serve their purpose and betray thee into their hands. If thou dost remain in Rome she will cause thee to be slain. Wherefore seem to obey her command. Cause it to be known that thou art shortly journeying to Judæa. But as it is in the first season of the year thou wilt go overland, sailing from Italy to the coast of Hellas, resting at Nicopolis and going from thence to Philippi and afterwards to Asia. There, in Ephesus, thou wilt abide and become, as is my wish, Overseer of the churches of Asia, Macedonia and Corinth. Once thou hast departed in this wise from Italy Poppæa will hold thee no more in remembrance."

"I fear for our Roman brethren," said Paul; "the Empress may persuade Nero to persecute them, or she will devise some plan that will cause them to be crushed and oppressed. I like not to desert my people in this hour. When the wolves range the hills the shepherd does not flee to the fold for refuge."

And Peter made answer, "I will be the shepherd of the flock. No harm will come to our people, Paul, if thou art gone from Rome. I promise thee, brother, to walk warily; for I know the temper of these perilous times. Also the people in Asia have need of thy counsel. They fall apart; they are entrapped in the worship of Diana and of the Mysteries. Verily thou wilt be a deserter of thy flock if thou dost not speedily return to Pergamos and Ephesus."

Paul had no more doubts as he gave his mind to the brethren he loved in Asia and to Lydia, the one woman he revered. Thus the way was clear before him and he rejoiced that the desire of his heart was not in conflict with his conscience. He declared to Peter his intention to depart from Rome within thirty days, the time allotted to him by Poppæa. Then the two Apostles communed together concerning the ordering of the Church. Peter agreed that he would cause his name as one of the Twelve Apostles to be hidden from all save the brethren for some time to come. He would go quietly among the Roman people until the Empress had forgotten, in her search for pleasure, the instructions of the High Priest, and thus would malice and danger be dispelled.

Paul told how Seneca had desired to give him audience, the invitation coming when he was in Hispania. "But I will not

seek him out," said the saint. "For he will oppose me with his science which is his name for truth and truth seeking, and it is falsely so called. The science of Seneca is the perversion of the truth. It is not what a man studies but his own integrity of soul which makes for truth, creates and builds up truth in the hearts of men."

Now Peter was astonished at this saying of Paul, and he made answer: "Seneca is a wise man and sways the minds of many in authority. Surely he will hearken to thy tidings, and being a just man, will perceive their truth."

"Money is the root of all evil,"¹ said the Saint of Tarsus. "Seneca declares that he scorns riches, yet he has amassed a great fortune and lives in a palace containing the spoils of many provinces. A man cannot live a lie and remain whole in mind.

"Yea, Seneca will hearken to my sayings. But because his life hath been false to the faith of his soul he will not accept Jesus, the Christ. It is but waste and weariness for me to speak with this sage. He gathered riches in order to retain power. Doubtless it is his belief that, through that power, he hath worked for the good, and it is true that through him justice reigns in the Empire. But his love of wealth and power is evil; and the Romans commit all manner of sin in only desiring and seeking such things. How could such a man as Seneca, who would seem by the manner of his life to believe that good is wrought through these two, riches and power, believe in Christ who scorned riches and died upon the cross?

"The way of Jesus is not the way of Seneca. This sage will tell me that he believes only in the society of gods and men, wide as the courses of the sun; that the earth and all living things flowed out of the fire of Heraclitus and will return once more to that fire. I have studied the sayings of Seneca and some are pure and lovely. But the life of this man hath defiled them. He is as virtuous and abstemious as any hermit. But believing in fire which is his symbol for power, his mind is of such a mould he cannot accept the sayings of one who renounced power and the Spirit.

"Nay, I have assuredly learned certain things from Seneca. He hath said, 'the world is my country'; and that is a good saying. But if I encounter this sage he will be like unto iron, unyielding because of the mould of his soul and his conceit of wisdom."

¹ I Timothy vi. 10. Lit.: "The root of all *the* evil," i.e. "Of all kinds of evil."

Peter did not dispute further on this issue ; and Paul then told him that in Hispania he had encountered a so-called sage. "And verily he was Satan," declared the saint. "In the mountains of Bætica I wrestled with this monster of perdition, this master of iniquity. All that time is now blotted out of my remembrance. But I was hard pressed and only overcame the enemy at the last."

After this Peter and Paul became silent and for a while were gathered into themselves. The cries of the sellers of wares, the songs of beggars and the brawling of idle men sounded up from the street below. And all the hours of light that noise arose in these quarters. Truly there seemed to be little peace ; only sound and tumult prevailing in this, the first city of the earth.

And Paul spoke softly, again telling of the cruelties, the harlotry, the licence, the corrupt search after gold that filled the lives of these Romans. His speech caused Peter to perceive the greatness of the burden of work set him ; but he was only troubled by the short measure of the days in which such labour might be accomplished. "The end of the world is at hand," he said. "In a little while we shall perceive Christ coming in the clouds."

"The end of the old world," answered Paul ; "the spirit of heathen worship dying in the presence of the Christ." He halted in his speech considering the argument, and then continued. "I speak of the unfolding of the Master's spirit that, like the unfolding of the pinions of a bird, will in due time cover and shelter all men, nations and living creatures. The earth will not break up and dissolve as was at one time my belief. It will continue, the spirit of the Master binding men together in one brotherhood, so that the world becomes one country ; all good people living in the unity of the one Church of Christ in every land."

But Peter would not agree with Paul's version of a future time. He held to his belief in the destruction of the world when Christ came again.

Howbeit, the presence of Narcissus was announced, so they spoke no more together, and granted him audience.

CHAPTER XXIV

NOW Narcissus came at the bidding of Poppæa to receive the answer of Paul of Tarsus. This freedman of Cæsar's household had a simple heart and no knowledge of the harlot's guile. He was confounded and abashed when he heard what she said to Paul. His limbs trembled; he quaked in the presence of the two Apostles.

Ever quick in the understanding of his fellow men, Peter laid his hand upon the brow of this troubled brother, saying: "Peace! God trieth the hearts of the just with fears and doubts, and thus they may become worthy of His trust in them."

"But these are perilous times, master," cried Narcissus. "Few men in places of authority live to be old. I have roused up this snake among women and secretly, in her own time, she will strike at me and all mine. For those at court who offend Poppæa there is only the choice of death by their own hand or agonizing death through torture and execution. And I am also shamed because in all innocence I have been the means whereby Paul has spoken with the Empress. He will perish swiftly, surely, and I shall be accountable for his end."

Motioning the saint to be silent, Peter spoke comforting words, telling Narcissus that he might bear the message to Poppæa that within thirty days Paul, obeying her command, would depart from Rome, travelling overland by way of Nicopolis and Asia. And here Peter stayed his speech; he would not utter a lie and say that the Seer of Tarsus would journey from Asia to Jerusalem. But the text of his message was well shaped. For learning of it at a later time from Narcissus, Poppæa believed that the snare she had set for the man she feared and hated had verily entrapped him, and that in a little time she would be rewarded by the blessing of the High-priest in Jerusalem. Being a devout believer in the Law of Moses, she counted much on this blessing. In her belief it would preserve her from the retribution that might fall on her because of a life of whoredom and open sin.

Having conversed with this woman concerning Paul, Nar-

cissus was no longer fearful; for he walked warily, measuring his speech. And she engaged him to be a spy and keep watch upon the brethren.

Howbeit, after an hour or so doubt, like some creeping insect, stole stealthily into the mind of this simple man. Again he visited the Apostles and laid his perplexity before them.

"Peradventure by surrendering the names and trades of the brethren to the Empress I shall betray them wholly into her hands. Masters, I am in an evil case, and it would seem that only in flight can I save my soul and honour. But in flight there is no surety; for Poppæa is all-powerful, and she will look on me then as an enemy, causing me to be charged with treason of one kind or another against the Emperor."

And Paul made answer. "Our brothers are assembling together in the upper chamber. We will commune with God and seek His guidance on this matter."

So these three ascended a stair and came to the place of the gathering. The deacons, Urbane, Stachys, Tabeel,¹ Cornutus, Amplias and Hermes² were all greeted by Peter, and they rendered to him an account of their charge.

Each had his part in the ordering of that community. Urbane instructed the women and children. Stachys succoured the poor among the Christians, Amplias aiding him in this disbursement. Cornutus kept the purse, but was not like Judas Iscariot, being true of heart. Tabeel was a strange man with long yellow hair and the eyes of a dreamer. He it was who possessed the gift of discerning spirits and speaking in various tongues. In the little churches that sprang up here and there throughout the Empire there was customarily a brother who could pass into the invisible world and, communing with the departed saints, give tidings of them to their living kinsmen who abode within the Church's fold on earth. Hermes was the scribe of Linus, the Overseer, and prepared the times and places for worship. Amplias had also charge of certain rolls on which were written the chronicles of the Church. These he buried beneath the floor of a room. For despite their charter of freedom the saints feared certain hostile Jews who dwelled in the Grove of the Muses, and also Gentiles who might at any time, out of malice, strike at the community. These saints were not liked by their fellow men. Daily they were a reproach to them by reason of their grave mien, their sober conversation and their, at times, unwary denunciation of the barbarous games and the lewd living of the Roman people.

¹ "Known also as Rufus."

² Romans xvi. 14.

Now when all the faithful were assembled beneath the one roof Peter uttered the exhortation, and praise and thanksgiving were rendered to the Most High. Then he told the tale of his labours in other lands, and lastly declared the need and purpose of this gathering. "These are perilous times," were his warning words—words imaged during the past uneasy night on his mind and on the mind of Paul.

Darkness thick and deep had descended upon the restless city of the Cæsars. Tumult, shouting, noise and brawling had swiftly passed into a silence caused by the blackness enveloping the streets and by rain falling heavily, sweetly, giving out low and murmurous sounds.

So there was peace within that chamber which was lit up by the wavering flames of three torches set in the altar that faced the east, from whence came the hope of men.

Like a green place in a parched land was the quiet that reigned about the brethren, they being gathered together in prayer; Peter and Paul seeking in the stillness of their souls that wisdom that comes only from the Spirit.

It was the hour of preparation, the time that precedes communion with that other celestial life that lies beyond death and change.

In a little while Tabeel began to toss and groan and mutter. Looking on him the saints perceived that he lay in a trance; and presently he rose up, his face changed, another spirit seeming to look through the windows of his body upon the world. And where there had been one Tabeel there were now two—another, a stranger. This is a great mystery, hard for the mind of man to read.

Tabeel interpreted for this stranger, saying: "He who dwells within me now is one who passed through passionate death into a holy life. He shows me the image of that death. There, he who was stoned lies upon the ground, bloody sweat upon his brow, his spirit passing, rising, lifting out of that tortured clay; while the young men cast their clokes at the feet of his persecutor, departing with fear and shame in their hearts from his presence."

"His name," cried Paul, "his name?"

"Nay, he gives me no name."

Then Paul cried out again, "It is Stephen, Stephen whom I caused to be slain in the days of my ignorance and backsliding." And the aged saint bowed his head, weeping bitterly.

Men stirred uneasily, looking at one another, fearful because

the master, strong as an eagle, was thus broken, becoming like other feeble creatures of the earth.

Then Tabeel softly sighed, continuing, "Stephen is now in the fair semblance of an angel and rejoices in that tortured death. 'Weep no more, brother,' is his saying. 'Be glad with me for I am risen in a body incorruptible. And behold I come bearing tidings of the end.'"

At this Linus and Peter stirred and pulled at their beards. Peter muttered, "Speak and tell us, I pray thee, of the time and season of that end."

"The mists hide all things from me," said Tabeel. "Pray that light comes."

And the whisper of that assembly and the voices of the rain made one voice. But the sound ceased as Tabeel spoke again.

"Stephen takes me by the hand and shows me two dark angels. They have wings like unto the wings of a stork. The wind is in their wings and bears them upwards and over the city of Rome. And there is heaviness and heat in the valley and a great silence."

Of a sudden Tabeel halted, and his eyes became hollow and empty and like the eyes of a dead man. But after a space the spirit looked through them once more, and now the words uttered were strong and full in their sounding.

"Lo, the first dark angel stretches up his hand and plucks a star out of the sky. He casts this flaming brand into the heart of Babylon. Yea, there it falls in places ye all know close beside the Circus, kindling and lighting up a twisted street. Yea, the Porta Capena is now like unto a golden locust; and the fires rise, grow and spread as a peacock's tail. Behold, the people run hither and thither, they waken out of their silence in every quarter of the town. Howsoever, swiftly spreads the flame of that fallen star, and the two angels blow upon it after the manner of women when they strive to kindle the warm ashes in a brazier.

"Now men, women and children perish. Some are burned, some smitten by falling beams of wood, some crushed by the crowd in their flight from the fire-stricken buildings.

"There is crying and lamentation and the Angel of Destruction declares the beginning of the end, saying, 'Woe, woe, Babylon is passing, perishing. Desolation is in her fields, her might and her pride are overthrown.'"

Here Tabeel halted, wiping the sweat from his brow. And

when he spoke again the brethren trembled as they hearkened to the tally of destruction and of ruin.

"Behold Luna's Temple, Vesta's Shrine, Numidia's Palace, yea, and the mighty Temple of Jupiter the Stayer of Flight, are all fallen. The valley that lies beneath and between the hills has changed into a nest of golden vipers. They leap and cast up their heads; they bite and strike, devouring the multitudes. They climb the hills; yea, it would seem that they seek to strike at the Palace of the Cæsars. Verily, verily, there is no end. This fire sweeps north, south, east and west, and the whole world is but one yellowing harvest of fire. It is the end, the Judgment, the time when the dead, small and great, rise and stand before God. And then are the books opened; and out of the things written therein the people are judged. But first Christ comes riding the clouds and with a great quake, the earth breaks up and disappears. He summons the elect, the faithful and true of heart."

"The time, the hour of this end?" asked Linus.

Again the eyes of the discerner of spirits became lost and empty. "Darkness is about me," he whispered. "I cannot see; I am blind."

Then the brethren prayed; and at last Tabeel, whose body had been pitched and tossed about, was still; and he declared that Stephen, having gone in the hour he had perceived the fire, now was returned. And behold, the voice of Tabeel changed, speaking no more in Latin but in the tongue of the Jews, and Tabeel was a Roman with little knowledge of their speech, yet the words came smoothly, and it was as if a Jew spoke through his mouth.

"Another summer will not have passed away before this city is ravaged and destroyed by fire. Nay, more, it is but one sign of the coming of Christ. There shall be tribulation and many signs and wonders before all that is passing perishes. But woe to Rome, woe to the city of the Cæsars."

And as these words sounded through that chamber the brethren groaned and cried out, beating their breasts. Then the lips of Tabeel made no more movement; he fell back upon the ground and lay there as some hewn tree. And no man stirred or ran to his side; all were gathered away within the vision painted by those strange words uttered in that past hour.

It was Peter who first arose and broke the silence, saying, "Brethren, bear these things in your hearts and impart them to no man. For they declare that time is near to an end; they declare that fire is the forerunner of the end. Watch, therefore,

and be prepared. . . ." And suddenly, because the saint was overcome by the thought of what he had witnessed, he changed his speech, swiftly spoke the blessing and bade the brethren depart in peace.

Marvelling and muttering to one another, they went in twos and threes from that chamber, passing out into the darkness and the rain.

CHAPTER XXV

A KINSMAN of Amplias named Demas¹ lived in a small house on a slope of the Alban hills. At his bidding Peter and Paul came to rest and to commune together in this place of quiet. Mark had returned to Rome from Corinth and was of their company in that week when they would consult together so that all things might be in order before Paul set out once more on his journeys.

The Saint of Tarsus had been somewhat shaken by the presence and words of Stephen's angel. But he held that appearing as a good sign, showing that his travels to the east were blessed. So these three and a fourth, Luke, the Master of Herbs, delighted in the last hour of sunlight when they approached the vine-wreathed house on the hill. And being weary, despite their gladness they sought slumber before the end of day.

It was between the seasons when spring and summer meet. Their spirits quickening, Peter and Paul rose on the morrow when the light stroked the dark. Now one bird then another sang. They might listen to the spring's heart beating in that dawn.

But the hours were precious in their sight. Three of the saints might not hearken, for separately they sought, through prayer, communion with the Spirit. Only the Master of Herbs went out into the early day and, listening to one song then another, plucked the first flowers and their leaves. For Luke loved all natural things, the sea, the grasses, the gracious lilies of the fields. And though his mind would dwell and dream among them, yet in that way he would find his peace and his God.

Now after they had broken their fast these four saints gathered together without the porch, and resting in the sun and gazing towards distant Rome, they began to speak of grave matters pertaining to the Church.

Peter took up the word, saying, "We have hearkened to the warning tidings given to us through Tabeel, and now we are assured that the beginning of the end cometh before the summer has passed away. Paul, it is, therefore, thy part to prepare the brethren in Hellas and in Asia for the last days of this world, for

¹ Philem 24, Col. iv. 14, II Tim. iv. 10.

the appearing of Christ in the heavens; and I will here in Rome also prepare our brothers, uttering the words of soberness and truth."

Then Peter spoke no more, for he was swift of discernment and perceived that Paul liked not his sayings. And presently this saint arose and thrusting out his hand towards the city in the far valley he declared the argument in his mind.

"It is my belief that fire will fall from the skies as Tabeel hath prophesied and that it will shortly devour Rome. But signs are hard to read, and I would say that out of the ashes of the city of the Cæsars we may well build the city of God. Verily, it is my deepest desire that the end shall not come until Rome is the possession of Christ."

"Nay," said Peter, "that may not be with the end at hand. But, even if it were not so, the Romans in authority are stubborn and froward and like unto mules; and so thy vision of the city of the Cæsars as the city of God will never be fulfilled. But tell me, Paul, how is it thou dost not accept this prophecy of the End?"

"I have sought to count up the tally of the believers in Christ," answered Paul; "and though I know not the true count I am assured that there cannot be more than five or six thousand in all the known world. Wherefore, if the beginning of the End be set in the summer of this year then the multitudes of the heathen are lost, having indeed no tidings of salvation. On the edge of the northern earth there lies a land named Britannia; no little people dwells in that country beyond the sea. They will not have heard, neither will all Hispania and those tribes in other Roman provinces have learned of the Gospel before the beginning of this end. Bear with me, Peter, for I have on this matter been truly perplexed, doubting and questioning. Wherefore I entered into the Spirit in the dawn."

"And was counsel given thee in that hour?" asked Mark.

"Yea, the Holy Spirit came unto me, and now I am assured that I possess a knowledge of what is yet to come."

Peter was somewhat troubled by this saying, for he reckoned that if Paul was not of his mind on this matter it would not be easy for them to be in agreement as to the government of the Church.

And presently Paul, who had been wrapped in meditation, came out of that stillness, saying: "I am ready now to be offered; but the time of my departure is not yet at hand. That I know, and it being so the time for the earth's destruction, the time of the

End may not fall in this present year, nay or even in the year that followeth it. The Holy Spirit was with me in the first hour of this day; so my sayings do not spring out of my own feeble understanding. The Spirit hath spoken. Let us heed only the Spirit."

Now Peter was not in his heart in agreement with Paul; but he dared not declare his doubt. So he spoke of other affairs, of the disbursement of monies for the poor in Christ, and then of Narcissus who served Poppæa. And the saints were of one mind concerning this freedman. He should remain at his post; and when the Empress demanded the names of the brethren and their trades he was to tell her who were deacons and who was head of the Church in Rome.

"Let us be fearless in all things," said Peter. "If persecution comes these brethren will remain faithful to the end. There is naught that we would hide; there is nothing of which we are ashamed. Narcissus may report all our doings, giving an account of every Christian, and not in any way offend." For now that Peter believed in the prophecy of the great fire that would speedily burn up Rome and the earth, no fear of Cæsar or his wife troubled his mind. He was tranquil, wholly at peace, knowing that soon, peradventure through pain and agony, he and all these loved brethren would rise into celestial life.

Only once he muttered in the silence of that eve, "Maranatha, the Lord is at hand."

Despite his age Paul was quick of hearing and caught the sound of that secret word that bound all the saints to one another. "Maranatha," he said, "yea, maranatha; but not in this year; nay, nor in the year that follows it. When my work is accomplished, when all the nations of the Gentiles have heard and hearkened then will my Lord come."

Peter made no answer, for Paul's presence cast a spell over his mind, so that in those last days passed in the company of the Gentile Apostle, he did not believe that the end of the world would come in the season of summer. But later when he dwelt in Rome and Paul was away in Asia he uttered the saying "Maranatha" and it was held and believed by all the brethren and they spoke it unwisely; thereby they hastened their own end.

WHEN NERO WAS DICTATOR

by
GERALDINE CUMMINS

Introduction by
THE REV. A. H. E. LEE, M.A.

VOLUME II

WINNIPEG PSYCHIC SOCIETY

Special Edition for
PSYCHIC BOOK CLUB
144 HIGH HOLBORN, LONDON, W.C. 1

VII - C.2

FIRST PUBLISHED BY FREDERICK MULLER LTD.

IN 1939

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY

SHERRATT AND HUGHES AT

THE SAINT ANN'S PRESS

MANCHESTER



Second Edition 1942

CONTENTS: VOLUME II

BOOK II (*continued*)

ST. PETER AND ST. PAUL IN ROME

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXVI. <i>Paul names Peter head of the Church, and then overrules him in their plans for the future of the Church</i>	137
XXVII. <i>The end of Narcissus</i>	142
XXVIII. <i>Paul meets the disguised Nero on the banks of the Tiber</i>	144
XXIX. <i>Paul visits the Churches in Asia. He witnesses the death of Lydia at Philippi</i>	154
XXX. <i>Paul goes on a journey in his celestial body</i>	159
XXXI. <i>Hillel, a fanatic, denounces Cæsar and imperils the safety of members of the Roman Church</i>	162
XXXII. <i>Fearing Tigellinus and his influence over Nero, Poppæa appeals to her astrologer, the Mage Joah</i>	165
XXXIII. <i>The Mage persuades Poppæa to give him authority to cause Rome to be burned</i>	171

BOOK III

ST. PETER AND THE GREAT FIRE OF ROME

XXXIV. <i>Peter returns to Rome. His work undermined. The commencement of the Great Fire</i>	177
XXXV. <i>Peter's and Mark's work for the brethren during the fire</i>	180
XXXVI. <i>Nero risks his life in the fire. The doom of the Palace of the Cæsars</i>	184
XXXVII. <i>Nero sings as he watches Rome burning</i>	188
XXXVIII. <i>The fire is extinguished. The Mage has it re-kindled by his agents</i>	193

WHEN NERO WAS DICTATOR		PAGE
CHAPTER		
XXXIX.	<i>Seneca consults with Nero. The Church of Rome is divided</i>	196
XL.	<i>An inquiry is made into the cause of the fire</i>	200
XLI.	<i>The first trial of the Christians before Nero</i>	203
XLII.	<i>Nero's early love for Acte. Simon Peter believed to be the author of the fire</i>	208
XLIII.	<i>The crucifixion of the Christians</i>	212
XLIV.	<i>The martyrdom of Peter and the alleged death of Paul</i>	216
XLV.	<i>The rebuilding of Rome. At Seneca's request Nero ceases to persecute the Christians</i>	219

BOOK IV

ST. PAUL AT THE JOURNEY'S END		
XLVI.	<i>Paul is rejected by the Churches in Asia</i>	227
XLVII.	<i>In response to an invitation from Linus, Paul travels from Philippi to Rome</i>	230
XLVIII.	<i>Paul is brought before Helios and committed to prison, to await trial</i>	237
XLIX.	<i>The conflict in Paul's soul. His desire to see Timothy and his fear that the Church in Ephesus will suffer</i>	240
L.	<i>Haunted by a vision, Nero renounces pleasure and attends to affairs of State</i>	245
LI.	<i>Paul refuses to dictate his Gospel to Luke ; he decides to wait until Timothy comes with the parchments</i>	248
LII.	<i>Helios consults with Nero about Paul. Luke's last visit to Paul</i>	250
LIII.	<i>Paul's trial before Nero</i>	254
LIV.	<i>Paul's last days in the Tullianum prison</i>	260
LV.	<i>The execution of Paul</i>	263
LVI.	<i>Linus makes a prophecy. On the day of Paul's death the Roman historian has nothing to record</i>	266
LVII.	<i>Paul is laid to rest in the presence of Luke, Mark, Timothy, and Onesiphorus. Nero gives a banquet</i>	268
APPENDIX		271

CHAPTER XXVI

BEFORE the saints communed further together they were greeted by two travellers who had climbed the slope that rises out of the plain; and these were Pudens¹ and Aristarchus. They bore letters from Rome; and after they had broken their fast they came from the house, and like Mark and Luke were content to hold their peace and hearken to the sayings of the two elders—those two veritable kings of the future of the earth.

When the murmur of talk and the exchange of tidings no longer sounded there was quiet for a space. The golden day flowed into their souls; the promise of that season lay before their eyes. But the two elders did not heed that smiling hour; their minds were away and working among grave matters on which they would give judgment. Of a truth they were faltering, not liking to hasten speech. For oft-times disputation arose between them, though no quarrels or bitterness ever sprang from such argument. Eager and set on the one fine enterprise, these two Apostles might disagree in almost every matter of import, but they were at one in heart and presented unity to the world.

Now of a sudden Paul signed to the brethren to follow his example, and he kneeled before Peter, crying out, "Verily, master, thou art the leader, we thy followers. Thou art in place of James and the head of the whole Church of Christ. For of the Twelve Disciples of the Lord only two others remain with us, and they are wanderers and in hiding. So art thou, Peter, the chosen one; and we pray thee to give us thy blessing in this hour."

Then Peter was glad, and he rose and stood upon his feet. Being great in girth and height he seemed to the kneeling saints to

¹ II Tim. iv. 21. It has been thought that Pudens served under Aulus Plautius in Britain in A.D. 43. There is a stone at Chichester dedicating a temple to Neptune and Minerva containing the name of a son of Pudentinus, apparently a Pudens, as the giver of the site. A marriage between a Pudens and a Claudia is described by the poet Martial. This Claudia was British and she is portrayed in glowing terms by Martial (Lib. iv.). The identity of Pudens in each case is, of course, a matter of conjecture. Cardinal Baronius says: "It is delivered to us by the firm tradition of our forefathers that the house of Pudens was the first that entertained St. Peter at Rome . . . and that, of all our churches, the oldest is that which is called after the name of Pudens."

be like Moses as this patriarch descended the slope of Sinai after his communion with Jehovah.

All shapes and appearances change though the spirit remains steadfast, unchanging. Peter was now an ancient owning to nigh on threescore years and ten. His white beard reached down to the middle of his body, and the hair upon his head was thick and long and the colour of fallen snow. Raising his hands he spoke the words of exhortation that may only be uttered by the Father of the Church, and last of all he sighed and stretched them out towards Rome as if he would encircle that mighty city with his love.

In this fashion Paul appointed Peter as chief of them all; and because of his many labours and the good confession he had made before Cæsar's court this would seem a gracious act, showing true humility of soul.

Howbeit, though the assembled saints hailed Christ's disciple as their ruler, it was but an empty title, for it was not this gentle soul but Paul who ruled in all their counsels in the days that followed.

They had speedily to choose an overseer for the Church in Antioch. Now in that city the Jewish saints were set against Gentile Christians. They would have no intercourse with them. Fearing, therefore, these Hebrews who so straitly kept their Law, not mingling with other people, Peter named a Jew as overseer who was of their kind. But Paul declared that such a man would not work among the Gentiles, and these would in time be lost to the fold. So he named another overseer; and as he would not yield in this matter Peter was compelled to yield. It was determined to appoint two overseers, one for the Gentiles and one for the Jews in Antioch.

Then, having gained his end, Paul spoke to Peter of the city which should be Christ's city—the capital of the Christian world, to which all churches should turn for guidance.

Peter held that only Jerusalem might be this City of God. "It is," he declared, "the City of Zion, and there our Master died upon the Cross, there we, His disciples, received the Holy Spirit in the time of Pentecost, there we lived and worked. Thou canst not deny, Paul, that Jerusalem hath ever been and must ever be the place of worship of the one true God."

And Paul made answer. "Thou hast told me that when Jesus walked the earth He spake of the desolation that would encompass and overcome Jerusalem, of a time when the people would flee to the mountains. And verily there are signs that such

a time is at hand. For we have privily learned that our countrymen will in due season make an uprising against the Romans, and if rumour be true this will be no small revolt, but the end of it is sure. No nation can overcome the might of Cæsar's legions. Wherefore it is not wise in these perilous days to name Jerusalem as the home of the Church. Thou art banished from it, while here in Rome thou art welcomed by Jew and Gentile and may live in peace."

Howbeit, Peter declared that such a rebellion would not come to pass and that even though he might never return, Jerusalem should become the city of God.

For one whole day the two saints debated on this issue; and again Paul prevailed. Peter in part accepted his ruling and was prepared to shape his course as if, in the coming season, Rome were verily to be the City of God. But in his heart he held that only to Jerusalem where was the Temple raised up by his countrymen, might all the saints journey in spirit, knowing it to be Zion's city, and therefore the one gathering-place either in the spirit or in the flesh for all the faithful who dwelled upon the earth.

In smaller matters that concerned the dispatching of brethren like Timothy, Titus, Tychicus, and others to the various communities in Asia and Greece, Peter yielded to Paul's will; and in those things that were of the administration of such communities, the head of the Church also surrendered to the authority of the Apostle of the Gentiles.

Now it may be said that Peter was unstable as water, weak of will, in thus permitting Paul to lead him in counsel. But he showed spiritual strength in submitting to Paul's will in these matters. For this man, who was in his youth a simple fisherman, had true humbleness of spirit, and knew well that the Saint of Tarsus was also the Seer of Tarsus. Paul had studied in the famed schools of that city. Respecting his learning and perceiving that by reason of his race he was accustomed to authority, Peter wisely suffered him to direct and pronounce judgments where a superior wisdom was needful. But in one matter the appointed leader would not brook authority or guidance.

When Paul was for two years imprisoned in his own house at Rome he had spoken hardly to certain zealous Jews who were Christians. He had wrestled in spirit with them. But this Roman community was not founded by him so his authority was flouted and derided.

Of these men Paul spoke in those days he communed with Peter on the Alban hills. "In past times they held with Juda,

the Gaulonite.¹ They bade the people not pay taxes, yea, they resisted authority and made assault against the guard. As thou knowest punishment followed; and verily, their acts did not become followers of our Master. For a time after the retribution peace prevailed on the banks of the Tiber; but now again one Pollio and these same men seek to stir up the spirit of revolt; and they are our brethren. Wherefore I would counsel thee to admonish them and declare that unless they go soberly thou wilt cast them forth from the Church of Christ."

But Peter liked not such harsh measures and he made answer, "I will go softly among them and will seek to win them through persuasion."

"Nay, they mock at persuasion. I said unto them, 'Let every man be subject to the higher powers. Rulers are not a terror to good works but to evil.' I bade them recognize the authority of Cæsar. But they went their ways, they paid no heed to my words; and now they go about the town speaking openly of Nero's rule as 'the reign of Satan', of his provinces as 'the Empire of the devil'. Verily, they are not of us, brother. It is needful if the community is to prosper and live in peace that thou shouldst separate from them else persecution will come, yea, and swiftly, as the hawk droppeth down out of the skies."

"These brethren are men of good works, and they are poor, suffering many hardships," answered Peter. "Jesus said, 'Come unto Me all ye who are sorrowful and heavy laden'; and I shall abide by His words. I will not menace these Gaulonites; I shall not speak hard words to them and cast them from the fold. They can be won by soft speech but in no other manner."

And Paul was sore of heart at this saying. He spoke at length, but Peter remained steadfast, and for a while the two Apostles withdrew from one another's company, walking the hills with Luke, Mark, Pudens, Aristarchus and Amplias. Howsoever, they were but grieved and did not quarrel; their noble natures forbade anger, and their creed would not suffer them to remain thus, for any long time.

As with James in another season, Paul gave to Peter the right hand of fellowship, and it was upon one still evening when all the world about them breathed peace that peace came dropping slowly, surely, into their hearts.

Then looking once more towards Rome, Peter uttered grave words, "Seneca hath surrendered up his authority; the reign of justice and mercy is ended."

¹ Acts v. 37.

And Paul made answer, "Peradventure, I have spoken in bitterness of this sage. But it is truly my belief that Seneca is not so far from the Kingdom of God. Only one who is great in soul could have uttered that saying, 'the world is my country'; yea, and other sayings that declare the way of Christ."

"But he is lost to Christ," said Peter; "if thou dost not go in unto him as thou wast bidden in a past season, if thou dost not seek to reason with him and persuade him of the truth."

"Seneca is set in his ways," was Paul's answer, "even as were the men of wisdom in Athens—they scoffed at my tidings. Verily, verily, I have no part nor lot with philosophers who would beguile me with enticing words, who would oppose me with their so-called science which can be as vain as the worship of false gods. Unto the Jews I came as a Jew that I might gain the Jews, and unto the Gentiles as a Gentile that I might gain them also. For such people were simple of heart and would open their understanding to my sayings. But Seneca and other men of his kind will ever close the door of their understanding. It is as a locked treasury of which they will not allow themselves to be deprived even for the one pure truth, the truth that Christ died for us, and alone through Him is salvation."

So Peter spoke no more of Seneca. And thus it was that Paul did not in his earthly life at any time encounter this sage, though he studied the rolls on which his wisdom had been inscribed.¹

¹ Fourteen Apocryphal Letters supposed to have passed between Paul and Seneca may be seen in M. R. James' *The Apocryphal New Testament* (p. 480), probably dating from the fourth century. Jerome inserted Seneca into his catalogue of Christian authors. "The letters of Seneca to St. Paul—which were known to Jerome and Augustine—are universally admitted to be a forgery."—*Encyclopædia Britannica*.

CHAPTER XXVII

AT times life gathers about you in folds like a dream or flows like a sleep-inducing river to the sea carrying faces seen and snatched away, and voices which fade into echoes."

The speech of the old philosopher flowed on smoothly. Now and then he pulled at his white beard. Looking at this ancient who had begotten him, Narcissus pondered and the weariness of spirit that had been his for many hours, as a mist on the hills lifted and passed away. He saw in all clearness the deed he would perform and the road he must follow.

"Flows like a sleep-inducing river to the sea." His soul retained these words and the further sayings of the ancient were no more to him than the unbroken hum that flowed into his hearing from that Roman town. "Yea," he said to himself, "the time comes sooner or later for all. I will make an end." So he rose up, bade farewell to his father, and set out on his last journey.

Certain Romans of ancient lineage still held to the virtues of their race, setting honour above nation, creed, or belief. After sorrowful days of meditation Narcissus knew that he could not betray even to the Empress Poppæa the names of those men of pure integrity whom he respected. And though the new doctrines of the Christians forbade the taking of life, for this Roman there was no other choice. Halting near the sea shore he set his horse free, softly bidding it farewell. Then following along a stony way he came out upon the sands that are not far from the mouth of the Tiber.

It was a day when the sun enriched all living things with its gold, when the sea, blue and still, appeared to this weary outcast as a mother waiting for her son—offering peace, the peace of forgetfulness of labour of mind, and of all the fretful and unquiet days.

Even now, when life and the great city called, her murmur drew this traveller forward step by step, wooing him like some enchantress, whispering of honour satisfied, of escape from remembrance of sorrow or despair.

"Faces seen and snatched away, voices which fade into echoes."

Uttering these words and thus declaring his farewell to earth Narcissus leaped from a high rock into the flowing tide.

For a while it was hard for this strong swimmer to yield to that gentle enclosing embrace. But, as the sun sank and the shadow of the end of day fell over the waters, Narcissus loosed his hold on life, sinking softly, sweetly into the enveloping waves, into his dream of eternity.

CHAPTER XXVIII

RETURNING from the hills Paul and Peter journeyed to the south, visiting brethren who dwelled without the city. These two old men were refreshed in mind by those days of rest when they communed with one another. But they were silent and sad at heart as they entered Rome by the Porta Capena. For they were assured in mind that they would not again come together in the quiet of the hills. It had been a rare and golden time, and they had, it seemed, been spendthrift of the hours.

Many things that are of the spirit and draw two of the one purpose together had been left unsaid because of urgent counsel to be taken concerning the Church, and now these things would not be uttered this side of the grave. For the warfare of the days lay before these two upon whose aged shoulders rested the burden of the faith, upon whom alone depended the destiny of the frail barque of the Church in the coming time.

The day opened, sunlight peering through pale clouds as Paul and Peter walked slowly and wearily along the Sacred Way. And suddenly there came a press of men and women running hither and thither, and in an instant the road was hidden as with bees in swarm. The air was filled by bawling and by shouts of "Cæsar cometh. Make way for Cæsar, make way."

Then Peter and Paul were thrust back upon the steps of a high building and the multitude, swaying before the thrusts of the guards, fell away below them in the hour that Augustus passed. So these two perceived, before men and women closed about them, Nero riding high upon his triumphal car. He was robed in white, a laurel wreath crowning his head, in his hands a lyre. In that time his face turned for an instant towards that high building; and these three gazed upon one another. The two ancients in worn, travel-soiled garments, the young ruler of Empire in glittering white, his fair hair turned almost to gold in the radiance of noon when the sun beats starkly, fiercely, upon the streets of Rome.

"Behold the very Spirit of evil," muttered Peter.

"Nay, there are evil and good in conflict within his soul,"

answered Paul; "I know not which will gain the advantage." But as the multitude pressed closely and Cæsar vanished from his sight, the Saint of Tarsus spoke again. "I have prayed and will pray once more that I may be suffered to commune with Augustus—not when he is in his courts surrounded by his slaves, but alone, as an elder who gives counsel to a youth, as man to man."

And then Paul held his peace, for this prayer and compassionate judgment of his concerning the young Cæsar had been awakened within him by remembrance of Timothy, his beloved, he who was as a son to him and one not hard as the granite that may not be shaped by the chisel. He was soft and of a sweet temper that is easily swayed by people and circumstances, and because of him the saint's judgment was less stern than that of Peter concerning Augustus.

The hour grew near when these two Apostles must part from one another. They held speech, therefore, with the elders of the Church, and there came argument and then contention inasmuch as Pollio, also known as Hillel, was spokesman for these elders, and he had been among the Gaulonites who had counselled members of the community to pay no tribute to Cæsar.

Now Hillel was an honest man. But as Aristarchus had said, he had the face of a goat and the ways of a goat; he did not possess his share of mother-wit. It was not until the end of day that Paul succeeded in his persuasion of this unruly Jew who delighted in wrestling wordily with his fellows on matters concerning the Law and also on the sins of Cæsar and his evil life.

At last he promised to walk warily, and to safeguard the Church he would not talk openly in the market-place, or with traders and vendors steeped in the iniquities of the times. Paul was indeed spent when he at last bent Hillel to his will and the assembly scattered, its members going their different ways.

Night had fallen and the stars had been lighted in the heavens while a wind from the south shouted down the emptying streets. Paul and his companions walked along a shadowed, twisty way between the dark walls of houses as they made for that quarter on the other bank of the Tiber where he lived in the house of Pudens and Claudia, and where he was well tended; for these two were ever careful of the disciple of Tarsus.

Few were abroad on that evening. The moon had not yet risen, and there was hazard for wayfarers in traversing certain of these winding, narrow alleys near the riverside.

Cornutus was old and lame and walked slowly, leaning upon a stick and the arm of Amplias. As these two and Paul passed beneath the arch the quiet was broken by a band of masked patricians that swept past them hard upon the heels of two men upon whom they laid violent hands. Cries of fear and wrath rent the air as these thieves, having stripped the two hunted citizens, beat them with clubs and then left them stretched and broken upon the stones.

It was an ill chance that being crippled Cornutus moved slowly, so he and his companions halted, hiding within the shelter of the arch. But the wild men returned that way, and one of them, perceiving Amplias, laid violent hands upon him while another struck at the stick on which Cornutus leaned, thus casting him to the earth. But when he would have set upon this brother, beating him, Paul came between.

And now the moon had risen, and the aged saint faced a young bully, armed and insolent. Looking upon his mask in that bright light, he cried out, saying, "Thou art verily coward as well as breaker of the law. Strike not a cripple and one who is old." And as he spoke this man drew his knife and advanced upon the saint with intent to slay.

Now this fellow was Tigellinus, and he accompanied Nero, thus seeking diversion for him through going to and fro in his company in the back streets of the city. They set upon honest citizens, robbed and ill-treated them for sport. But this was the first occasion on which one had thus boldly rebuked him, and the insult burned in the favourite's soul.

For a while he withheld his blade so as to torment his victim, saying, "Thou shalt perish for this, old man, if thou dost not on the instant kneel before me, entreating my pardon."

"I kneel only to God," came back the saint's hasty answer. "If thou slayest me now Cæsar's justice will find thee out. Cæsar will hold thee accountable for this act. Verily, he is the ever watchful father of his people—the mirror of justice and mercy."

In past times the dread name of Augustus had served Paul well. So now when menaced by death he cried that potent word, flinging it at his adversary.

Then Tigellinus became more incensed and thrust at the saint, seeking to pierce him through the heart, so that he might on the instant perish. But another man in a dark cloak cried, "Hold back," and stayed the hand of the smiter. "Enough, I would speak with this fellow," was his saying; and obeying in-

stantly, Tigellinus and his troop withdrew into the shadows of the arch.

For now the moon had hidden its face in a fleece of cloud, and the aged Seer of Tarsus could not, therefore, with his dimmed eyes see the face of the young man who, pulling at his cloak, led him to walk apart beside the river Tiber.

As Paul had often said to his disciples he was "all things to all men", so he strove ever to attune himself to the rhythm and beat of each stranger's soul. Thus in the hour of peril he had cried out the one signal virtue of Augustus, his fairness in judging accused people who were brought before him.

And walking beside him that night, Nero was uplifted by the challenge made by Paul to the favourite Tigellinus and his vanity had, therefore, caused him to preserve Paul's life. He said:

"Tell me, O greybeard, those words of thine concerning Cæsar—are they true words, coming from the heart?"

"Yea, they come from my heart," Paul answered, "for it hath been my good fortune to know the justice of Augustus." And thereupon he told of the injustice and hatred of his own countrymen and of how he had been preserved by that just ruler of Empire, Augustus. "A young man," said the saint, "but old in wisdom and merciful, for in the first ten years or more of his government no man was condemned to death by him. Wherefore, Cæsar is a merciful father to his people."

Then the young man was the more uplifted. He laid an arm upon the old man's shoulder and there was delight and joy in his voice as he told the saint that Cæsar had many cares, that the burden of the whole known world rested upon his shoulders. Their little minds could not appreciate the loftiness of one who was in truth born of the fire of the gods—poet, singer, artist, and the mighty all-merciful governor of his people.

Then he forgot himself and became curious, questioning this bent and aged man who, though dressed in a plain, worn cloak, by his speech and bearing betrayed the breeding of the patrician.

"Art thou of a noble race?" he inquired.

"Yea, that is so," came back the careful answer.

"What is thy business? Art thou a Stoic, one of the philosophers?"

"Nay, nay."

"That is well. The philosopher throws stones at sparrows all day long."

"Truly said."

Then because of these short answers, Nero became more curious

and taxed the saint with questions concerning his life and his pursuits. And Paul loosened the armour of his defence, cast from him the spirit of prudence. Moved by this man's youth and his artful and devised innocence, he told of his work on earth. He spoke, saying:

"Christ is the first-born of all creation. Through Him thrones, principalities, lordships and powers seen and unseen, the whole wide earth took on visible semblance and sprang into being." Here Paul halted an instant, and then in few spare words related the chronicle of Jesus, saying at the last, "When still the world was not, God imaged this design, and it hath been kept hidden these many ages, but now in the fullness of time it hath been revealed to certain chosen people on the earth. Verily, Christ is mightier than the angels and demons, the dark powers of magic, than all the starry powers. After His death He descended into the lowest underworld. But God raised Him in power to sit upon His right hand, and He hath led the angels and demons captive in His train."

Now it was not Nero's wont to hearken to any long speech delivered by another. Ever he liked to cut short the measure of men's words. He had listened more patiently than was his custom, but at the saying, "led captive in his train," he thought of his own triumphs, and broke in, crying:

"It is the tale of a poet, old greybeard. But thou hast neither the wit, nor the artifice of a poet; thou art not limber with thy words. But I, who have been hailed as Apollo, might, if it pleased me, shape this tale of thine into a great poem, and a great spectacle. For it contains mystery and it contains terror. But there are profane and foolish matters within this chronicle of thine that should like dross be cast away. The name of Cæsar is impugned in thy fable. Wherefore, I would change this chronicle and set it in Ethiopia, the land of mystery. Certain Romans who adventured into that country, bore back wonder-tales concerning this hidden land. They spoke of rhinoceroses, elephants, peacocks, leopards and lions, dog-headed men of the desert, and of a king and his palace—a palace marvellous and set in starry gems. This fable of thine shall be laid in Ethiopia, and its rulers shall take part in the spectacle, and therein shall also figure thy two gods—the one unseen, who begat the son thou hast named Christ. And I will devise terror and awfulness that will set all Rome in a frenzy when this son who is god and is slain passes triumphantly with shield and sword through its murky depths. Lastly, in lovely words I shall tell of

how he rose in power, and in spectacle will show him with angels and demons led captive in his train."

Now the saint perceived that as Cæsar had drunk much wine, his somewhat fuddled mind passed easily into dreams of folly and vain deceits.

But, astonished by his foolish words, Paul strove to give him understanding, declaring that he, Paul, spoke the truth, and that he was no fablemonger. So these two had no real understanding of each other, and it was only after a space, when Cæsar's heated blood had cooled, that he could perceive that he spoke with a seer who was wholly concerned with righteousness and the faith in which men lived. Enjoying argument and still liking this stranger who knew him not—this nourisher of his vanity—he lifted up his voice, shrill as a peacock's cry, piercing the quiet of that deserted street.

"It has been well said that thoughts of life and death, of righteousness, of growth and decay are but troublous ghosts that haunt the couch of the uneasy sleeper. Let him sleep the deep, untroubled sleep of carelessness. It is foolish to vex the mind with riddles of good and evil, for man cannot alter the stature of his mind; but he may nourish and fertilize his imagination. In truth he can no more escape from his own measure than the tailor can escape from his tape measure. All men are ill or well tailored, and must abide by that form or appearance they present to others." Here Nero smiled at his jest, adding thereunto: "High laughter, loveliness and labour at the poet's craft, these are the employment and the pleasure of great souls, and such is my industry, O stranger. I lose myself in the beauties of art, and thus I may forget the ugliness of man, the brute nature of my fellows. Thus I may soar into the Empyrean and enter the enchanted circle of the gods, reigning as king among them.

"Though it may well be true that the gods are not, and their histories like most chronicles are perhaps fables, yet they serve the poet for the building up of poetry and story. Thou hast said that this fable of thine is a true chronicle. Nay, it is too near to matter for verse to be a true chronicle. Thine is a good understanding. Waste it not in belief in the superstition of the gods. Hold them only as images with which fancy may play, and fashion out of them mystery, awfulness and immortal song."

Pleased with what he held to be a shapely speech Nero ceased and waited a while in stillness for his companion's answer.

But Paul remained silent, sensible of the gulf fixed between himself and this man, and troubled also by the dawning knowledge that mayhap his prayer had been answered, and that he stood in the presence of Augustus; and they were as man to man. Yet how might he profit by this strange circumstance, this signal hour when he was oppressed in spirit as by some wizard's mantle of darkness, as by some web of evil that seemed woven about this, to him, forsaken youth? It so repelled him he continued to hold his peace.

And Cæsar's mind was also searching, he, too, being stirred by the nobleness which was Paul's, and which even now awakened his imagination. He called to mind the sage of Corduba, the wise tutor of his youth, the minister abandoned in these last folly-ridden months. And it seemed to him that this master, Seneca, was in the likeness of his companion, and he spoke of him, saying:

"An old counsellor once advised me to journey into Spain, the land of the moon-goddess, where I might find much that would enrich my mind. But this pedagogue was like thee, concerned only with the nature of man and of the world. I am not concerned with either save in so far as they are warp and woof for my song."

The night deepened. Paul sighed, for he desired to break away from the company of this man, yet was filled with pity for him now that he perceived that the web of evil that had been woven about him was spun by Tigellinus, whom all in Rome knew to be infamous in his mind and deeds. But he was more, for the saint in this time discerned that he had called up the dark powers of magic, and through them, trapped this youth as in a fowler's snare.

"Stranger," said the Seer of Tarsus, breaking silence; "I am concerned for thee as a father for his son. Verily, I know—for the Spirit telleth me—that thou art possessed by two beings; thou art as the moon that hath a dark and a bright side. And behold, in these last years, the gloom gathers, the night in which there are no stars creeps over thee. It is because one strong in witchcraft, armed with the Powers of Darkness, casts a hood over thine understanding. Let him not continue to prevail else he will destroy thee. Truly I perceive a rare radiance about thee that will be put out for ever, quenched like the flame of a candle dip, if thou dost not return to thine old counsellor and friend, if thou dost not set him up in place of this son of perdition."

This speech pierced Nero's soul. He stood still as a statue

upon the road, whispering fearfully, "These are strange words. Dost thou know my name and race?"

"I read only the temper of thy mind. I can discern and penetrate into the hidden places."

"A diviner then?" Cæsar asked; and he became very thoughtful, speaking at last plaintively like a little child. "The old counsellor will not come to me. I prayed him to come."

"Then go unto him. Fall upon thy knees, implore him to abide with thee and preserve thee from this evil usurper of power who rules thy life, who hath enveloped thee in the dark obscurity of that unlit half of thy soul."

Then Nero became incensed against this stranger and cried, "Never have I kneeled to any man. Never will I entreat or beg a favour of one who hath refused to come to me."

"And why hath he refused thee?" asked the saint. "It may be that thou hast been froward in rejecting his counsel, in taking only the counsel of the man who holds thee in thrall."

It was as if Paul's words stabbed at an old sore. In his heart Nero knew them to be true, but his pride rejected them. In another season he would not have permitted such speech to be uttered in his presence; he would on the instant have given the fellow over to torment. But such was the power of the saint it now seemed to his companion as if he walked in a dream and conversed with his daemon. In that shrouded night Paul was not, to his mind, a live man. Crooked of shape and of low stature he was the spectre that all men encounter at some time in their long journey between the cradle and the grave. And so Nero made no fiery answer; he spoke sullenly, and yet as one who confesses a secret trouble to his familiar spirit.

"I am not a slave to any man. I am the poet of poets; and this old counsellor would clip my wings. He likes not that mine should be ever a life of joy and delight. Verily he is no father to me yet he would play the father and so constrain me. Wherefore I have turned to this man of my generation who marvels at my song and quickens my imagination."

"Yea, quickens it through the powers of darkness."

"Art thou of this belief?" asked Nero, and he trembled as he spoke. "Dost thou discern peril for me? Is he a weaver of magic?"

"I can but tell thee what I perceive written upon the very air about thee. This man will prove thine undoing, will lead thee into a place where the poet's song is never heard, where the lyre is not sounded. But there is yet time. Go on the morrow

to the old counsellor and let him be reinstated once more not as master but as the friend of good counsel." Here the saint halted to take breath, and he continued then to tell of the truth and the life, and of how he, the poet, might declare this long-hidden truth to all nations and people; and thus he would be saved, would remain as a glory within the memory of men till the end of time.

Nero was stirred by this saying and inquired as to the nature of this truth. But when the saint spoke again of Christ he had no understanding of his words. It was as if they held no meaning for him. His addled headpiece ached and he returned again to his own trouble, to his fear lest he might be shipwrecked if the old counsellor walked no more by his side. And when Paul again assured him that this would come to pass the young man fell into a heavy silence.

It seemed that the saint had won, had prevailed with Cæsar, who looked on him as no mortal man while they paced to and fro in that loneliness apart from others, enclosed within themselves.

The night lifted; the moon shone upon the river Tiber. Nero started. The strands of the dream that held him fast were breaking. In that radiance he looked upon a yellow face and into eyes unfathomable. A little wind breathed over their foreheads. Paul spoke:

"The Spirit quickeneth, the Spirit giveth life. That old counsellor serves the Spirit. Turn now from the evil of the flesh, from that demon-ridden friend of thine."

Then deceived, peradventure, by the brightness of the moon a cock crowed—once, twice, and thrice.

It sounded, as in another time, a fateful hour for men. For that shrill call scattered the last fragments of the dream, waking Nero to the common things of life, causing him to sink swiftly into the deceptions of his own world and to remember again that he was Cæsar and a master of song.

His laughter answered the cock's crowing, and his whole manner changed as he spoke, saying:

"Old greybeard, thou pratest like a whole school of philosophers. Thou knowest naught of high adventure, of the creator of beauty, of the kingdom of the immortals. Go hence quickly else I will prick thee with my sword. For thou dost ensnare with thy wizard's speech."

"I seek only thine own good." As Paul spoke his eyes held the young man's eyes, and he quailed, drawing away, muttering:

"I would have none of it; and I pray the gods thou dost not again cross my road at any season or time. Thou art baleful; and whether thou art of earth or of the powers of the dark and no mortal, I bid thee begone—begone on this instant." And in that command Nero declared his own craven fear.

So the saint, now spent from this encounter, lingered no more, but withdrew, shadows swiftly enveloping him.

And when the companions of Cæsar drew near, making lively conversation, he silenced them. Moving away, even from Tigellinus, he walked beside the glimmering waters, his mind casting forward and casting back, his soul so sorely troubled he had no more heart for speech or song.

CHAPTER XXIX

DAWN like an enchantress suddenly broke up the night with its coloured shafts, penetrating with arrowy light every hovel, palace, temple and building on the Seven Hills. Only in the valleys of the city dusk lingered and the shadows were deep.

A little way beyond the gates of Rome Paul and Peter stood in the dawn preparing sadly to take leave of one another.

"The end of the world is at hand," said Peter; "I know that, in this life, we shall not meet again."

"Thou wilt go before me to the Father," answered Paul. And laying his hand upon Peter's shoulder, his eyes searching the other's eyes, he continued: "Let thy spirit call my spirit when thine hour of agony is at hand; and then, though leagues of sea divide us, mountains and hills stand betwixt thee and me, I shall hear thy summons and come and stand by thy side."

And Peter strove to find words to answer Paul, but by reason of his trouble, speech failed him in this hour of parting, and bowing his head, he assented; and then having embraced one another, these two uttered the blessing and went their several ways.

Slowly, and with halting step, Peter returned to Rome. And all that day he abode alone in one room praying that, in the hour of death, Paul of Tarsus should be suffered to stand beside him.

That aged saint swiftly put trouble and heaviness from him. His mind filled with joy as he thought of Timothy, his beloved, who awaited him at the end of his journey. Favourable winds bore his ship eastwards, so that it seemed no long time to Paul before he gazed once more upon the Temple of Diana that stood up above the other buildings in Ephesus.

He remembered how he had secretly fled from that city in the time Demetrius, the craftsman, had made a great tumult, and he was glad now that a church, which had many members, awaited his return. But greater still was the joy of meeting and greeting the youth Timothy in the house of Onesiphorus and of sharing with him all the happenings that had befallen them in these past two years.

There was much to tell; and again and again, Paul said

tenderly, "My son, my son," as if he found joy in the very utterance of that word that signified fatherhood for him.

Now Timothy was thirty years of age; but to Paul he seemed ever the youth who could not grow old. Slender as a sapling he had that frailty of bearing that made him still seem a young man who had not, so far, acquired the girth of those in manhood's prime. And frail also was the nature of Timothy. He could not stand up firmly to the buffeting of the world. That very gentleness of his which led him to yield in all things to the fiery spirit of Paul, betrayed him when he had, as head of the Ephesian Church, to have dealings with all manner of men, since to knit together the people of various nations who were Christians, it was needful that he should be bold and stern as Titus.

The very things in Timothy's soul that were dear to Paul—his yielding temper, his kindness, his obedience—led him to fail as an elder and leader. Soon Paul learnt that the Church of Ephesus had been rent by dissension through malice of tongues, through the licence of some, through the hard bitterness of others who were ascetics, and the spreading abroad of fables about Christ and His resurrection.

Howbeit, Paul was not cast down on hearing these tidings. He considered the matter and then sent for the leaders of four parties that were sharply resentful of one another. He listened in silence to their long speeches, and thus was compelled to perceive the shortcomings of his son Timothy.

Now to certain of the Ephesian Christians the sound of their own voice was lovelier than any music in the world. In the assembly of the Church they desired through long discourses to display their learning, adding doctrine to doctrine until the new brethren knew not what to believe. And Timothy had not the power to compel these men to remain silent.

Certain among them declared that the earth and all things in it were built and shaped by angels, that God lived in light far from men. He was not a loving Father, concerned with their welfare, who watched over each of his children. Awful in majesty He dwelled apart and alone. Such was the teaching of Hymenæus,¹ and he spoke of an army of angels and said that Jesus was chief among them, and only when He was baptized in Jordan was He promoted to be the Christ.

Now there was no malice in Hymenæus. Though learned, he was a fool who had fasted overmuch, so his understanding was

¹ I Timothy i. 20. II Timothy ii. 17.

weakened, his mind a granary of fables and of invented genealogies of angels and unseen powers.

The son of Alexander the coppersmith had joined the Church, leading Timothy to believe that he was opposed to his father in this matter of his being a Christian. But he lied. Paul's old enemy had bidden him enter the Ephesian community, for, being a contentious, wordy fellow, he would in time sow dissension among the brethren and thus destroy the Church. Yet such was the power of his persuasion he had won Timothy's heart so that the two were good friends, being of the one mind concerning the virtue of drinking no wine and abstaining from the eating of meat.

So the young Alexander was appointed deacon of the Church. And when its head was away preaching in the smaller towns of Asia he suffered Hymenæus to make long discourses and to speak even before white-headed elders who were upright and of sound doctrine.

These prayed Paul that the two young men should be removed from their place of authority in the Church; while other Christian Jews prayed the saint to banish certain Gentiles who were wine-bibbers and had on one occasion assaulted Hymenæus, striking him to the ground when he uttered false doctrine. They had also cast out from the chamber of worship the revered brother, Aquila, who had rebuked them because of their violent manners.

Then certain strict Jews complained that the wives of the Gentile brethren braided their hair, wore costly raiment and precious stones, and thereby sinned against God and were a cause of trouble to the eyes of the younger brethren. And many more were the tales told by the members of the Church, some but trifling complaints, others of grave import. Then Paul perceived that Timothy, through listening to all parties and condemning none, had permitted the assemblies to become a place for tumult of divers kinds.

So on the Sabbath, when all had come together, he spoke out sternly, condemning the leaders of each of the four parties; and then carefully, wisely, he showed in a few words how Hymenæus had led many of them astray. He spoke to the women, rebuking them, and afterwards to the elders and deacons, declaring their error in gentler words. Finally he promised them that he would have set down on a roll those things they should believe, and so they would know what was true and what was false doctrine in the coming times.

Such was the effect of Paul's presence all the brethren agreed to submit to his ruling, and while he abode in Ephesus peace reigned in the Church. But when spring came he journeyed to the little churches, twelve in number, which were scattered throughout Asia; and he was of good heart in the time he greeted Epaphras in Colossæ. For here the people were simple of mind and lived in accord and desired only to hear the sayings of the saint and to obey his commands concerning their lives.

But it seemed to him that his time was short; and so he would not rest for long in any town. Soon he was on the road again, journeying to Troas; and from this port he sailed to Macedonia. There was joy in his heart when he cast his eyes over Philippi, and yet this joy was tempered by pain on his encountering Lydia¹ and seeing that she was now bowed with age; and on her face were the signs of weariness and sickness, showing that her course was nearly run, her hour at hand.

"Thrice, Paul, the Angel of death called me in the past season of winter," she said to him; "but I strove against that summons, I would not yield to its importunity; I would not go until I had gazed once more upon thee, and hearkened again to thy voice."

Paul was moved in spirit by this woman's love in that she had tarried, turning back from the Place of Rest so that she might once more greet him when he came again to Philippi.

"I promised that I would wait for thy blessing, Paul," she whispered. "So I am here. As of old my house is prepared for thee and for thy disciples."

The saint lived there for three months, meeting the believers; and all that time so near was Lydia to the grave she seemed only to live in Paul's presence.

But in the hour the saint came to bid her farewell she roused up, saying:

"Paul, in those times of tribulation that will shortly come upon thee, if thou art heavy of spirit cast thy mind back to Philippi and to those old days when we together laboured to build up a church in this town; when Luke and thou planned and dreamed of thy conquest of the earth for the Master. Think of those days of our prime and forget these last hours."

With a sign of his head Paul assented. Then having found voice for speech he spoke the blessing; and kneeling down beside her bed, prayed that her soul should be speedily freed and at rest.

Luke, Demas and the Philippian brethren were all assembled in that room while the high noon of summer faded into evening

¹ Acts xvi. 14.

and at last her spirit passed. The voice of Paul of Tarsus ceased, and in that silence he bowed his head, weeping bitterly.

For an hour they left Lydia alone with her Lord, and when they came again to that room the hand of death had touched her gently, surely, here and there so that her cheeks and brow were smooth as the soft countenance of youth and she looked beautiful as she lay at rest.

.

It was not in sorrow but in gladness that Paul departed from Lydia. He journeyed to Thessalonica, and in the weeks that followed a great calm enwrapped him round. As he said to Luke, "I see image by image the story of her brave life—Lydia in her youth, my first convert at Philippi, Lydia the seller of purple, ever kind, ever bountiful, the lady of perpetual succour, the consoler of many; Lydia who never failed man or woman in her prime or in the enfolding years of age; Lydia, the Mother of Peace. Verily, she was no woman but a spirit, enclosed for a brief while in the garment of the flesh. Would that other women were like her; but that may not be."

Then when Paul once more sailed for Asia the peace of that gracious spirit went with him, so that morning, noon or night he was glad with a strange gladness that was not of this world but was a foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven. Even in the hour he contended with the obstinate people of Ephesus, Luke perceived that he did not lose that joy, and while the light of Lydia's spirit was thus about him he was so strong he quelled the contending parties in the Church and exacted a promise from the young Alexander and from Hymenæus that they would remain silent and would accept the instruction of Timothy and his, Paul's, epistles, in the coming time.

One day tidings came to Ephesus of a great fire that had destroyed, the messengers declared, a quarter or more of Rome. Some said they hid the truth, that greater had been the destruction and that many had perished in the flames. But even then Lydia's gracious peace sheltered Paul. So though others of the brethren were filled with fear lest friends or kin had died in that time, he would not suffer himself to become troubled or afraid.

"It is God's will," was his word. "But the end is not yet." And his radiant peace bore peace to those who were about him and who hearkened to his sayings.

CHAPTER XXX

IT was in the height of summer when day and night swiftly meet. Luke slept in the same room with the aged saint, and at moonset, in the darkness before dawn, he was roused by a voice crying, "Yea, yea, I come."

Thrice were these words spoken: and then he perceived that Paul stood, fully robed, near the glimmer of a candle.

"Master, what is the summons? Wherefore art thou risen when day still tarries?"

Then the saint told his physician to go forth with him while still all the people slept. Not daring to question Paul because his manner was stern and strange, Luke obeyed him, and together they went through the still streets. Passing out of the town in the early light they climbed a steep way until they came to a grove of olives; and there they rested and looked out towards the sea.

Now this grove was owned by Onesiphorus,¹ Paul's host at Ephesus. And near to the olives on the brow of a little hill was a shelter to which came ailing brethren who needed rest. At that time Artemas² and Demas lived in this hut, and in a little while Paul said to Luke, "I shall tarry here for three days or more. Let no man speak to me in that time, and let Demas and Artemas in their turn watch by me. For now I go on a journey across mountains and seas; and even if I tarry a long while rouse me not, for I shall enter and return through a state beyond time, space and memory."

Paul knelt and prayed, and thrice cried out, "I come"; and afterwards he fell back upon a slope of earth, breathing heavily, sorrowfully. Then at times it was as if he were a runner, fleeing from death, so fearful were the sounds of his moaning breath. Almost, at one moment, it seemed as if his body was riven in pieces; then the writhing of his limbs lessened, and at last ceased; as gently as the fall of a leaf he sighed, and lay still.

Through all the hours of the day Luke watched beside the saint; and when he required rest Artemas came, abiding there in

¹ I Timothy i. 16.

² Titus iii. 12.

that warm night until the setting of the moon; and with the flooding of the eastern sky with light Demas released him, remaining in his stead.

Through the morning hours this young man watched beside the unquiet body, hearkening to its sighs, doubting and wondering. He was one of the chosen brethren loved by Paul, and yet he lived in fear of the sharp integrity of this great Seer of Tarsus, and now when alone with him was more than ever afraid; for it seemed to him that rays of light illumined the dark robed shape and were thrust forth from it, making a radiance in that dull day.

Towards evening the dullness became blackness and the sky was robed in night and clamorous with thunder that, like a wild beast, went roaring to and fro, making earth and the heavens hideous. And Demas was afraid and cried out for help. Then Luke came running swiftly and commanded the young man to go hence and not to return again. For Luke held that Paul was away in his celestial body and feared lest the cries of Demas would swiftly recall his spirit from its wanderings.

But still the saint remained in that swoon; and hours passed and the thunder, groaning and muttering, passed also down the sky, dropping into the gulfs of night.

Then, in the hush before morning, Paul's body was shaken and twisted as if he were in torment; and it also seemed to Luke that a radiance, blue and strange, like lights upon the sea, danced about it; but in time these faded out one by one. Slowly, Paul opened his eyes to that dim, colourless hour.

Luke went to him and freed his robe, and in a little while he spoke softly, as from a great distance. "I am weary, for I have wrestled with the shadow of a night older than the sun. I have known all sorrow, known the piercing sharpness of every torment, and yet I rose and was borne above these states of being, and I then knew the joy ineffable of witnessing the resurrection of the elect."

When Luke further questioned the saint concerning this strange time he would answer him nothing; and on their return to Ephesus he conjured the physician, Demas and Artemas to speak to no man of those hours passed in the olive grove. They severally held their peace, not even speaking of it among themselves when tidings came from Rome of the burning and crucifixion of Roman brethren. But the messenger could not declare the names of those who had perished. He did not know if Peter still lived. He could only say that Linus had led certain brethren

into a sure hiding-place, and there they would abide until the fury of the Roman rulers had somewhat abated against them.

From that hour Paul found no rest for his feet upon the earth. He journeyed hither and thither in Asia ; he sailed for Crete, the island where lived a debased people who had no acquaintance with truth or honour.

There in that country of tawny hills and grey rocks, of little smiling valleys, Paul worked and talked for a season, then sailed for Corinth—a worn and weary man, but glad at heart because all had been well established by him in Crete ; and Titus, resolute and stern, remained to hold that church fast for him.

CHAPTER XXXI

SOME days after the departure of Paul from Rome little Sclaudia, the daughter of Nero, died; and all the people mourned for the stricken Emperor and Empress. But Hillel, the Gaulonite, went to and fro, and in the evening gathered together the slaves and outcasts in the poor quarters of the town. He spoke freely to them, at times lashing himself into a fury, declaring that God's vengeance had fallen upon the Emperor, that the Lord had slain his infant daughter because of the abominations of his life. It was a sign of the coming of the End. That very summer, Christ, the God of the slaves, would cast down fire from heaven and burn up Rome—throwing down the palaces of the mighty, burning up people of authority, in the flames. But He would deliver the slaves and outcasts and cause them to be borne up to heaven by His angels, where they would live in Paradise for everlasting. In truth Christ would come as avenger of the poor and as the conqueror of Nero, the beast, who would be overthrown by the might and glory of the Lord.

The slaves cried out their joy, making great talk and clamour. Then when their frenzy had passed Hillel bade them disperse quietly and pray that the End would shortly come and the Empire of the Devil be overthrown.

After one of these gatherings Stachys,¹ who served in the imperial household, came to Peter and said:

"Master, I must render up my stewardship to thee. I cannot be a deacon when this fellow, Hillel, speaks night after night against Cæsar and declares that Christ will come and overthrow the Emperor. These sayings are treasonable, and thou knowest that we shall all be in peril of our lives if such discourses continue to be made."

Then Peter rebuked Hillel, commanding him in future to remain silent. But the man was sullen and only promised that he would talk warily. And now, though he did not speak to the gathering of the people in open spaces, he still continued to seek out the slaves in small groups, talking to them of the

¹ Romans xvi. 9.

Emperor's abominable life and of the vengeance of the Christ that would swiftly fall upon him.

So Stachys came again to Peter and gave him certain keys he held as deacon, saying, "I believe in the Christ preached by thee and Paul, but I must withdraw from a community of which Hillel is a member."

Now it was in this hour that Peter's gentleness of heart betrayed him. If he had been Paul he would have perceived the peril of the time and excommunicated Hillel. But he only reasoned with this wild man of Judæa, and then told Stachys that all would be well, for Hillel was muzzled as the ox, and would not speak but would only work for the Church in the coming days.

"Nothing will silence this spouter of hatred and wrath," answered Stachys. "He will flow on as everlastingly as the river Tiber. Wherefore I sever myself from the household of the Church, and I go in sorrow, fearing for my brethren."

With that this wise man departed in haste, not answering the call of Peter, who believed he might yet reconcile this Gentile with Hillel and Hillel's followers. For there were many men who believed in the sayings of this fiery preacher; and if Peter had banished him from the Church he knew that he would lose half the community. So, fearing the break-up of the Roman Church and remembering how the Antiochian Church had been riven and almost destroyed, Peter let Stachys go and suffered Hillel to continue his harangues to the slaves and the outcasts.

Indeed, in a little while, Peter was so moved by the prophecy of Tabeel that fire would fall from Heaven that summer and devour Rome, he, too, became once more assured that the end of the world was at hand, and speaking of it here and there, he placed himself beside the Gaulonite and seemed to the ignorant, and the people of little understanding, to be at one with his teaching. But Peter taught Christ's doctrine of charity towards all men, and he bade the slaves obey their masters and love even those who smote them and heaped bitter wrongs upon them, treating their wives and children like dogs.

Thus Peter and Hillel preached love and hatred, treason and obedience, in the one community. But they were seldom in the same place together: for believing that the last days were at hand, they worked ceaselessly, teaching in different quarters of the town.

Summer passed away and autumn bore with it no signs of fire, nor of the destruction of Rome by earthquake or tempest.

The court no longer mourned for Claudia Augusta, and the old display of wealth, the games, the festivals made the city once more a centre of abominable evils in the eyes of Zealots like Hillel, Tabeel, Junias, Philologus, Hamul, Hermes¹ and Linus. For Linus also upheld Hillel and persuaded Peter against his better judgment to permit him freedom in his speech. And when the new believers complained that fire had not fallen from Heaven and Christ, as promised, had not come, then Tabeel sought the word of truth again, passing into trance in the assembly.

In due course he declared that the number of the elect had not yet been gathered. Only when the slaves of Rome had almost all been enlisted in the service of the Master would Christ come. In another year when summer was once more with them the number of the elect would be made. Then they might be prepared for the great fire and those last days of triumph and glory when the slaves would be first and the rulers and nobles last.

So through winter and spring Peter, despite his age, laboured morning, noon and evening for the faith, until at last he fell sick from weariness and was compelled to rest in the Alban hills until strength came again.

With his departure from Rome there came a loosening of authority, and now Hillel and his disciples were free to preach hatred and vengeance and to prophesy the speedy overthrow of Babylon and of the harlot Empress and Cæsar, the beast.

¹ Romans xvi. 14, 15.

CHAPTER XXXII

WHEN Claudia died Poppæa was grief stricken, fearing, indeed, that she might lose her power over Cæsar now that his line was no longer assured through her child. Nero had said that they would follow the practice of the Pharaohs, that a woman, his child, would reign after him; for it was the custom for the daughter in ancient Egypt to inherit the throne in company with her husband.

The death of Claudia destroyed Poppæa's hope of governing Nero and the Empire through little Claudia Augusta. Now again she must contend for the first place against the other favourites of Nero, and against Tigellinus whom she feared most of all. For he could always divert Nero by appealing to the dark side of his nature, by leading him into vile pleasures and making a drunkard of him, thus giving back to her a quarrelsome and soured husband, wearied and exhausted by debauchery.

It is true that, for a while after the loss of Claudia, Nero was kind and gentle to Poppæa; and having enrolled their daughter among the gods, he made poems and sang sad songs to the harp, and remained by his wife's side.

It was, perhaps, grief at the loss of Claudia that led Poppæa to forget Paul and the sect of the Christians. For she sent no further emissaries to make inquiry concerning them; and Narcissus, who was of the court and by his presence might have recalled Paul to her mind, had taken his own life, and so was also speedily forgotten.

On the day the infant died Nero spoke to Tigellinus of the strange man with whom he had walked and talked beside the river Tiber, and he said, "Surely this fellow was a wizard—one of those easterns who practise necromancy and, peradventure, he hath slain my child; or was he one of the dark beings who spring from Pluto's kingdom, an avenging spirit sent by my mother to destroy the light of my life and joy?"

But Tigellinus made mock of this fancy, saying that he was but an old dotard, one of these strangers who seek to gain a livelihood by setting themselves up as philosophers when they are veritably as asses who bray all the day long in the public places.

Then Cæsar was comforted and put his fear from him, not remembering Paul until that day when the saint came before him for judgment.

In the spring of the year Nero sought to win the homage of his people by singing in the theatre at Naples; and at that festival he became glad again, for his audience and his courtiers made a great noise, applauding his music. So hour after hour he sang to them; and they wearied long before he wearied, inasmuch as he had the voice of a bull and the neck of a bull and, as one said, would sing everlastingly if the heavens or the gods did not silence him. For his conceit was great in that time.

But one sultry noon, when a multitude strove in the theatre against slumber, earth herself rebuked him. Their seats were suddenly shaken, the walls seemed to rise up from the ground, and then, though they did not fall upon the people, they quivered again and yet again.

There was shouting and cries of terror, women falling in swoons, men turning this way and that, but held back from panic, flight, and perhaps death, by the sight of the white-robed Emperor who continued to pull at his harp strings and to sing his song.

Such bravery delighted the people, driving away fear, and they remained in their places until, at last, Cæsar ended his singing and, bowing his head to them smiling, waited for their praise.

And great was the thunder of their clamour. In that hour Nero was their beloved, their father, their god. For he had played a brave part, preserving, by staying the panic, the lives of many.

But when they had all departed from the theatre another earthquake shock put an end to it as a place of song, by causing the walls to come crashing down in ruin.

Nero wrote a poem of thanksgiving, and, on the instant, determined that he would journey to Greece; and there as poet and singer would win the hearts of all the Greeks. But tidings of a conspiracy compelled him to return to Rome and to cause Torquatus and others who had planned to dethrone him to be seized and brought to justice.

Now again Cæsar lost his gladness of heart, and once more Tigellinus, the fisherman and horsebreeder, tempted him with low pleasures and incited him to quarrel with Poppæa.

One evening in the presence of his courtiers, he taunted her for not having borne him a son and asked if he were married to

a woman who had become barren. Then she became angry, for she was afraid, and gave him back taunt for taunt, saying when they were alone together, "It were better thou didst attend to the government of thine Empire and didst no more play the mountebank, making thyself a sport for the base and common people."

In speaking thus the Empress sorely wounded his vanity, and he struck her and called her a whore. Yet he loved her for her beauty, and she divined that it was only because Tigellinus had set him against her and had made him drunk with wine that his fury overcame him and changed him into a white-faced tyrant. She had seen the look that was now upon his face when he had consented to his mother, Agrippina's, death. So she rose up, and silently swept from the chamber.

That night when Nero desired to speak with her she would not see him, knowing that it were better to take the high hand with this spoiled Cæsar: and he did not command, or force himself upon her. Then she became the more afraid, and one of her spies told her that Tigellinus had said, "Poppæa is basely born, but it is easy to find another Empress of nobler birth."

Fear became terror, and, robed in a dark cloak, she hurried by a secret way to an underground place where lived her counsellor, the mage, Joah.¹

Now this man had been much spoken of in Rome in the reign of the late Emperor, Claudius. For he had then performed in public what seemed miracles to the ignorant citizens. But when Nero came to the throne he withdrew, seeking no more to win favour with the rich, but watching for a rising star, to which, his divining told him, he should bind himself and rise also.

After a time he encountered Poppæa, and he promised her that through his magic he would cause her, if she obeyed him, to become ruler of the world. And in due course all that he promised came to pass. Then being proud and imperious, Poppæa sought his counsel no more, deeming that, as long as her beauty remained, her will would be Cæsar's will.

Nero had been careful with his money, living, indeed, as sparsely as the ancient Romans. But she caused him to change the order of his life, to spend his treasure lavishly. He became a new being; and all might have been well for Poppæa, if slowly, surely, Tigellinus had not also gained power over Nero, so that now, at last, he seemed the controller of the Emperor's will.

¹ A Hebrew name meaning "Jah [God] is brother."

Poppæa stood in a shadowy chamber hung with tapestries, in the presence of the mage.

He was tall and lean, a white beard hiding his neck and throat, his eyes bright and hard in the gleam of the torches that lit up the dusk. And though he bowed before her she trembled, for she knew that she had erred in not having sought his counsel, or seen him in the year that had passed.

She dismissed her slave woman; and when the two were alone the mage changed in his manner. She was no more the Empress, he was the master. Yet he spoke softly:

"Daughter, I knew thou wouldst come. I have seen thy peril and thy discomfiture, this long while, in the pool of dreams. Thou must yield to me in all things that concern affairs of this life else thou wilt fail and perish. I promise to be gentle, I shall not pull at rein or curb, I only desire thy well-being and our triumph."

And Poppæa answered, "I am prepared from henceforth to be guided by thy wisdom alone. I trust thy learning and thy magic—speak on."

The master fixed his eyes upon her, saying, "Before I give counsel I must first earnestly entreat thee to have no child. The stars are against such a happening. I have read the scroll of the heavens again and again."

"But this is folly. I have passed thirty years. Only through a son shall I continue to rule Cæsar and the world."

"Birth and death are bed-fellows," muttered the mage.

Not heeding his words, Poppæa groaned and cried, "I can still hold Cæsar with my beauty; but soon it fades, then I shall be cast out like a withering flower. In this matter of a child I dare not obey thee, master."

Joah laughed, and as suddenly, he turned upon her snarling like a wolf. "I see there is no trust between us. Go! Leave me to my meditations. Go!"

The greater fear banished the lesser fear. Poppæa cast herself at his feet, imploring him to have pity, promising to be his slave, to be guided by his counsel in all affairs if he would but remain her father, her dæmon, the helmsman of her ship.

For some time the master paid no heed to her lament, standing there straight and stern. But, at last, he bent down and raised her up from the earth, exacting as he did so the promise that she would not permit Nero to make her fruitful once more. In that time this eastern was kind and affectionate as a father, murmuring words of comfort that drove her fears away and gave back to her

imperial pride, hope, and courage. She told him that an hour ago Cæsar had declared in the presence of one of her spies that he was weary of his spoiled Empress, that he would leave the bitch in Rome and sail to Egypt in a galley in the company of Tigellinus. The singers of Alexandria had delighted his hearing; and they had promised him a welcome from the artists, the poets and men of learning in their country that would prove to him that the Romans were indeed rude barbarians. For the subtle Egyptians alone could value and understand the true worth of his genius as a poet and master of song.

"Thou wilt lose him if he goes," said the mage. "I perceive behind Cæsar's desire the will of Tigellinus. This journey must not be taken. Thou art in grave peril, daughter. I will, therefore, draw the powers of air, fire, earth and water to me. I will confront the magic of Cæsar's favourite with my own magic and overcome him."

At her master's bidding, Poppæa laid herself down, hiding her face. And strange sounds came out of the earth, shrieks and cries clamoured about her; then, of a sudden, quiet came again.

She uncovered her eyes and saw that the room was filled with a vapour of incense and strange spices. The floor was carpeted with glimmering spiders' webs and the mage moved to and fro between their strands, halting at last before the altar. There he stood, a great dark figure, and he murmured unknown words, addressing shapes that were not human, gathered together below him, filling that chamber. Poppæa scarcely dared breathe, but she was no longer afraid, not even when flames suddenly leaped about the master. Taller, greater than ever before, he seemed like a giant of an elder world come out of the mists of time.

Slowly, noiselessly, he stepped down from the altar and circled about Poppæa, drawing around her a white circle of light and, with a rod, making a cross, the yellow sign in his ritual, which signified the balance of the universe, the measure of every judgment.

And still Poppæa remained unafraid. But she covered her eyes with her hands; for they could not bear the radiant fierceness of that white circle of light. There followed strange noises and trumpetings, the sound of the mage's voice speaking swiftly, sternly, the sentences that commanded the spirits of air, earth, water and fire to return to their own elements.

A long time seemed to pass before a voice said, "It is well, daughter. Open thine eyes."

And when Poppæa looked that dungeon was as before—a

shadowy room hung with tapestries, lit by torches and paved with stones.

"Cæsar will not go to Alexandria."

"But he is as stubborn as all the mules of Italy when Tigellinus has his ear," answered Poppæa.

"When he has visited Vesta's temple tell him that the omens are against his journey to Alexandria and he will heed thee," said the mage. "Be not fearful. I have made all fast. Tigellinus cannot strike at thee in this present hour; but I cannot yet speak surely for the future. For in the coming days my magic art contends with his magic, and I have not seen whether he or I gain the advantage."

Humbling herself once more before the master-magician, Poppæa promised to obey his commands and softly withdrew.

CHAPTER XXXIII

FOR several days Nero feasted and rioted with Tigellinus. He would not visit his Empress and seemed bound as with a chain to his favourite, heaping upon him gifts of priceless gems and other treasures. And those few who were intimate shook their heads, whispering:

"Poppæa's star is declining. She is a proud and rash woman. In her wrath she will seek to have Tigellinus slain, and he will discover this plot to Nero and declare that it is a plot against Cæsar's life. Death is Poppæa's portion. For now that Nero does not see her she cannot win him again through her loveliness."

But these sayings were only murmured among a few and did not reach the ears of the courtiers, the gossips and the scribes.

Howbeit, when Nero was resting on a stone bench in Vesta's Temple, the cold of the seat and the fumes of his past days of debauchery clouded his mind, so that when he tried to rise he staggered and was held to the stone by the fold of his cloak. If he had been clear in his wits it would have been easy for him to jerk himself free; but as it was he believed that he was gripped fast, and his strength could not avail against it.

Petronius, who was near by, freed him; and leaning upon this man's arm, Nero bade him lead him quickly to a carriage. There was fear still in his eyes as he entered the pavilion in which he knew he would find Poppæa. And, as in an earlier time, like a boy going to his mother, he stumbled towards his Empress, throwing himself down beside her, laying his head in her lap, telling her of this strange mischance.

"Thou alone hast the old Egyptian knowledge of magic, Poppæa," he cried. "What does this portend? Am I to die? Have magic arts been used against me? Is this a sign of my end?"

"Nay, nay, Cæsar," she said gently. "If thou dost heed me thou wilt not die. These are signs given thee by the dæmon, which declare that thou wilt perish only if thou goest on this foolish journey to Alexandria. Rome has need of thee; thy

people have need of thee, and," she whispered softly, "thou art my need."

To the sick and weary Nero, Poppæa had never looked more beautiful. "Like Mother Isis and like Helen—my sheltering protector, lovely beyond all other loveliness," he cried; and forgot his quarrel with her, forgot Tigellinus, and was once more the lover of his Empress.

She caused him to issue an edict that declared that Cæsar so loved his Roman children he could not find it in his heart to depart from Italy and journey to Egypt. Then the people were glad, partly because they feared that Nero's agents would withhold the food supplies if he were no longer there, and also because of the gaiety, the games and festivals he offered them. To them Cæsar had, by his conduct, proved himself a true father of his great Roman family.

Because of their joy Nero was content for a time. He studied his people, going freely to and fro among them; and then he spoke of what he had perceived to Poppæa.

"Many of the Romans think money, talk money, and would eat money if they could not keep it in their possession in any other way. They put wealth first and beauty last. The gods of the Capitol are no longer offered statues and other treasures of Greek art. They only receive gifts of gold. A man will sell his father for a few pieces of denarii. And Rome itself! It stinks in my nostrils—a town of narrow, twisted streets, filled with unsavoury odours, a barbarian city, a dung heap in midsummer. Would that Rome were levelled to the ground by an earthquake, then I might show my people that beauty and art alone have worth, alone are glorious. I would give the whole of my fortune to build a new city that might outstrip all Greek cities in its loveliness. I would show these Roman usurers that Cæsar does not care for paltry wealth, and that he is an artist before he is an emperor."

Nero confided many things to the Empress in that time. Then, at last, sure of her power, she spoke against Tigellinus, asking that the favourite should be banished from the court. Spies soon carried the tale of her words to the Sicilian, and he swiftly countered this tale with subtle sayings in which Poppæa was not named; and the substance of them was that women were only for enjoyment; but such enjoyment would become a peril to a lover who allowed her to taste the sweets of imperial power. It was not true that Agrippina had poisoned her husband so that her son should reign in his stead. He was her pawn. From

the hour of Claudius's death she had held herself to be Cæsar, divinely appointed to rule, and Nero was only a slave who carried out her commands. When these were not obeyed she had become a creature of hatred and wrath. If she had not been dispatched she would have sent her son before her down the shadowy way. For this reason even Seneca had advised her death.

"Well, what of it?" asked Nero, his face dark and sour.

"When beauty fades history sometimes repeats itself."

"If thou speakest of the Empress," cried Nero, "it is a false and foul scandal."

"Nay, not so." Tigellinus spoke swiftly, for Cæsar's hand was almost at his throat. "Thought of the Empress was indeed far from my mind. But now thou hast named her I would beg thee to believe me, Cæsar, when I say that I would give my life for thine."

"Of that I am assured," answered Nero, who was easily won by this favourite's peculiar power of persuasion. "I have often called thee my faithful watch dog."

"Then, is it not strange," inquired Tigellinus, "that the Empress should ask for the banishment of a most devoted servant and friend, of one who watches at Cæsar's door night and day?"

There came no answer to this question; and Cæsar was sullen and silent when some hours later Poppæa tried to please him with her beauty and her talk. And her mind filled with its purpose, she spoke at last of Tigellinus and again of banishment.

Then Nero became angry and quarrelled with her on this issue, and so he sought out Tigellinus and kept his own counsel, only neglecting Poppæa. In the company of the Sicilian his nights were darkened by drunkenness and ugly pleasures, Cæsar making neither music nor poetry. Then the Empress sent a message to the mage, demanding that he should come swiftly to Antium, for she was again afraid.

They encountered each other one warm night of summer in a small garden lit only by starlight; and soon the mage learned of all that had passed since Poppæa had come to Antium, and he answered her reproaches, saying:

"The magic known to Tigellinus wholly protects him against any assault made by my familiar spirits. I cannot break him by my magic art; but I may well confound him through superior strategy. Of late I have at night-time visited the trans-Tiberine

quarter, and there I listened to a hairy eastern, a madman who prophesied that Rome would shortly be destroyed by fire. He was not a rebel who would set it ablaze, only a crazy fool belonging to what is known as the sect of the Galileans. I cannot, therefore, use him and his disciples and strike through them. But his words have shown me the path we may in safety follow. If thine agents set fire to Rome in the height of summer the pestilential quarter of the city may be wholly destroyed, and we then could divert Cæsar's mind with the building of his Greek city. He is ever a man who loses himself in his work, if it is of great moment in his eyes. Thou wilt not be troubled by the plotting of Tigellinus when Cæsar is wholly occupied in the planning of broad streets and fountains, and of another palace of the Cæsars."

"I am afraid," muttered Poppæa.

"Be fearless and guided by me, and I shall make thee ruler of the world. Only give me a good sum of money and I shall find certain men of other races who hate Roman rule, and I will pay them well for the task of setting fire to Rome."

"But what if inquiry reveals the author of this destruction?"

"That crazy fool, the Jewish prophet, and his sect can then be accused. There are many witnesses of his prophecy concerning the fire that his god will send to devour Rome. I have made inquiries concerning him and his followers. They belong to a community who own as their leader one named Paul of Tarsus, a seditious fellow, who hath been the cause of rioting and tumult in Asia and in Greece."

Then Poppæa remembered the accusations made secretly to her by the High Priest, and she recalled her encounter with Paul and her fear, that was not of this earth, of his hostile power.

"It is well, master," she said. "Hasten back to Rome and see that this work of destruction is speedily accomplished."

So the mage received from the Empress a good sum of gold; and he set out before dawn for the ancient city of the Cæsars. And when in the light of the new day he surveyed its towers he was glad because of their coming destruction, and because certain of the people must perish in the flames.

BOOK III

ST. PETER AND THE GREAT FIRE OF ROME

CHAPTER XXXIV

FOR many weeks no rain had fallen in Rome. The air about the Seven Hills was as hard and dry and clear as that of an Arabian desert; but in the streets and in the valleys it was close and fetid.

Returning from the Alban heights, Simon Peter scarce could breathe in those pestilential ways. Three deaconesses, Eustachia, Paula and Melanie, welcomed the aged Apostle at the House of the Vine,¹ which was now the centre for the Church in Rome. Members from the communities of Asia, Judæa, Egypt, Pontus, Greece, and from Spain all came there and were fed and, if without means, aided by charitable brethren. It was from here Peter dictated his epistles to Paul and to those churches in the east which he had founded.

Now the three deaconesses washed his feet, cooled his brow, and set food before him. Soon he was refreshed in body and mind. Then Mark came in and kneeled before him, asking his blessing. Mark had been away from Rome, travelling in Bithnyia and Pontus for many months. He was as dear to Peter as Timothy was to Paul.

These two, the grey-headed John Mark and the white-haired Apostle, embraced one another, and afterwards talked long and earnestly of the spreading knowledge of the Christ, of the great unfoldment of His doctrine. "If we are wise it will, in a few years' time, overcome the abominable evil that stalks abroad naked and unashamed." Thus Mark spoke, and then, sighing, continued. "But, master, I am afraid for our community here lest in this present time it is betrayed and all its good work brought to naught by the Gaulonite, Hillel. In thine absence he hath been preaching in the open spaces near the river to the slaves and outcasts—speaking against rulers and kings, denouncing authority, and saying that the humble and the poor will rise in triumph while their masters are overthrown, the end of the world being at hand."

"Yea, it comes speedily," answered Peter. "But I am troubled

¹ "It was called by this name because Christ once said, 'I am the true Vine and My Father is the husbandman.'"

by thy words, for I commanded Hillel to preach no more in public but to go privily among the people, speaking to them in twos and threes."

"He hath changed the hearts of the deacons also," said Mark, and though, as Peter's scribe, he revered the Apostle, yet he continued his protest. "They, too, speak of the overthrow of authority. Verily, we shall be undone if this doctrine of revolt continues to spread in the Name of Christ." And so earnest and so provoked was John Mark, that after a while Peter promised to rebuke the deacons and brethren who were now assembling. But the aged Apostle dreaded contention. He would have the Christian community as one peaceful, orderly family yet he perceived that his gentle words only roused up fierceness and violence in the heart of Hillel, who declared that he would not and dare not remain silent.

"For fire will fall from heaven and burn up Rome this very summer. The Lord speedily cometh, and there are many still in darkness whom I would win for Christ and number among the elect, before that dread hour of the world's destruction."

"There is no certainty that it is all but upon us," cried Mark. "It is more likely that many innocent brethren will be sent to the galleys, scourged or tortured because of thy seditious speech. It ill becomes a servant of the Master to speak against authority, against rulers and kings. I am assured that Christ will come in glory within the lifetime of those who are present here and now. But I cannot hold with thy belief that we shall witness the End and the judgment this present summer."

Then, in further scathing words Mark denounced the wild sayings, the wrath and vengeance preached by this Gaulonite; and so vehement was he in manner and speech, the brethren hearkened to him and would not permit Hillel to utter a word. Peter followed after him, saying that he was of the same mind as Mark, and he bade the community accept his teachings, for he had walked with Christ and known the Master in the flesh.

But in that very hour when it would seem that Hillel's authority had been overthrown, his right to preach and teach taken from him, there came a sudden change, clamour from the street, shrieks and shouts, the sound of hurrying feet and the entry of Nereus,¹ crying, "The fire—it burns, it burns. Our Lord cometh! Hasten, prepare! Behold the great light over the Palatine hill, behold the first signs of the End."

Hillel shook off those two who held him down; and with

¹ Romans xvi. 15.

shining eyes he bade the brethren follow him and obey his commands. Then, turning away from Peter and Mark, he led them all into the street, and they stood about him, a little group, hailing him as their master.

They gazed with wonder, awe and thankfulness at the fire that slowly, surely, devoured the blackness of the northern sky and offered them the promise of resurrection and of paradise.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE heavy heat oppressed the people and few walked the streets of Rome. Many citizens were in their beds, and even the soldiers drowsed at their posts. Cæsar was at Antium, his court having followed him there. So no roystering bands broke the quiet of the streets, and the poor and the merchants, who alone remained in the city, would soon be asleep.

But near the Circus Maximus, among the shops and wooden hovels, dark figures went to and fro, halting here and there, then hurrying on again, leaving behind them glowworm trails that spread and broadened, that at last became huge flowers of flame.

Then the people roused up, running from their houses, hastening towards the Circus, only in time to see fire bursting from it, suddenly and awfully, forming a high mountain of glowing light.

This corner of Rome had been well chosen by the agents of Poppæa. Stores of oil and the ancient woodwork of the hovels nourished the conflagration let loose upon the heavy heat-laden night.

The people were confounded and panic-stricken by fierce men who guarded the circles of fire, menacing them with death when they tried to stay its course. "We have authority from the highest in the land to burn these ant-heaps, to destroy the whole burrow," they cried, flourishing knives, dancing and singing with mad merriment. Protected by armed bullies, youths flung flaming torches into the little shops and houses, careless of the lives of those who might still remain within them.

The old and sick perished from suffocation or were roasted alive as in an oven. Scores were trampled to death on the stones in the narrow alleys, or enveloped in streamers of flame that twisted and swooped across the streets, barring their way. Soon the fire leaped and vaulted down the broad valley between the Aventine and Palatine hills; multitudes shrieking, shouting and lamenting, ran before it.

In those early hours authority had deserted the city. Those soldiers who pretended to help the wealthy when their mansions

burned came but to rob and plunder on that first night and morning, making no brave effort to check the flames.

These, like scarlet battalions, raced up the slopes of the hills, even attacking the ancient palace of the Cæsars, encircling it, sweeping it from their path. Flame-haloed night, smoke-clouded day; pain, fear, chaos, horror. Hillel and his companions alone rejoiced as the temples of the old gods fell into ruins as though smitten by the hammer of their Lord.

On that first fateful evening, when Mark and Peter remained alone in the House of the Vine, they had prayed for a short while, then, rising from their knees, went out into the street. There they beheld the frenzied group gathered about Hillel, and Peter gave swift orders, forbidding them to behave in this unseemly fashion and calling on them to come to the chamber of assembly, where they might hold the Hour of the Watch and learn the Will of the Holy Spirit.

"But Christ cometh," cried Hillel; "at any moment, the heavens opening, He will appear in glory. We shall not see Him if we are closeted in the dimness of the house. We shall not witness His glory as His angels herald His approach."

Again Peter spoke to this man, striving to reason with him; but he might as well have spoken to the wind. Hillel swept past him, calling on the deacons and others to follow and to sing psalms of greeting and of thanksgiving to the Lord.

And all the younger men were moved to exaltation by his gestures and his sayings. So, in ordered march, they went down the street, chanting the psalms of David—their faces radiant, their eyes ablaze with hope, delight, ecstasy, believing as they did that the Last Judgment was come and that they would speedily be carried up like Elijah into those still, sombre heavens.

Then sadly and yet with serenity, Peter and Mark re-entered the House of the Vine. There, in the company of Eustachia, Paula and Melanie, they sought the counsel of the Spirit and were bidden to seek out the members of the community who lived in Rome. They were to succour the stricken and to provide a home for the homeless, to provision the house, and also to watch and pray.

Scarcely sleeping for two days and nights, John Mark and the Apostle went to and fro, helping the aged, those maimed by the fire, and the homeless, praying with them, watching by them. Then in the hours before dawn they rested, sinking into the deep slumber of exhaustion.

It was on the third day of the fire when Mark and Peter,

refreshed and invigorated by this rest, went out in search of lost comrades. They came once more upon Hillel and those deacons and Christians who followed him.

They stood watching a burning mansion, and their faces were so joyful that one Roman cried to them :

"Ye are glad then of this destruction?"

"Yea," answered Hillel; "for it is a sign of the End. My God has cast down flame upon this abominable city, and I am indeed of good heart, because He will not rest until all is destroyed and not one stone remains upon another."

"Robber, plunderer," cried the Roman. "Thou art one of those who have fired the town," and he struck Hillel to the earth. Then certain of his friends who were about him beat and buffeted the Christians and might have slain them if cries that fire was encircling them had not led these men hastily to leave off and to flee from that winding way.

The Christians only rejoiced at the hurts and buffetings they had received; and Hillel began to preach to them, but he ceased on perceiving Peter and Mark standing by. For in his heart he was ashamed because he had disobeyed the command of the head of the Church.

But before Peter could speak to him a patrician, wearing the badge of his rank, came staggering from a villa that was now suddenly alight and devoured by flame. Half blinded and distraught, he called to Hillel, asking him and his companions to help him to save his daughter, who had fallen and was being smothered in the hall of the house.

"Nay, master," said Hillel; "we will raise no hand to aid thee or thine. For this is a purging flame sent by God, and all save the elect will be consumed in it."

"Thou art mad with the madness of the fire," cried the patrician, and he turned to others, entreating them, saying that his wife and elder children had already perished, and this, his youngest daughter, was the last living of his family. But only Peter and Mark hastened forward, for their hearts were moved by this man's grief. And, casting off his cloak, Peter was the first to stumble into the smoke that now hung in a suffocating cloud about that dwelling.

Fighting their way forward, these three came at last upon the shrivelling body of a woman, and they dragged it forth even as tongues of flame leaped at them. Then, when out in the open and freed from that darkness of coiling smoke, Peter fell to the earth overcome and as one who is lifeless.

Exaltation faded, and Hillel and his followers at last gave their aid. Raising up the body of the old Apostle, they carried him to an open place where the air was clear of the fumes.

They left behind them the patrician lamenting over his dead daughter. Then suddenly, wildly laughing and shouting, he rose from beside her, and, running towards the furnace that had once been his home, he leaped into the devouring flames.

The brethren obtained a litter from Pomponia Græcina, and placing Peter within it bore him back to the House of the Vine. But now even this dwelling, or part of a dwelling, was menaced by the advancing tide of fire, and Linus, who had only on this day returned from northern Italy to Rome, consulted with Mark.

They determined to bear Peter and other stricken brethren to the Tombs, where, it was said, if there were room, the living might be saved by keeping company with the dead.

But when Hillel was told of this plan and asked to help them carry the sick he answered :

"What availeth such labour? At any hour Christ will appear in the clouds and the last Trump will sound. Then shall we be encircled by hosts of angels and carried up into the heavens. It is not for us to raise a hand, but to wait here and watch and pray for that time, which in one short hour may come upon us; and if we be busy with other things, then we shall be caught as a robber in the night. We shall not, as is needful, be awaiting our Lord, singing psalms of praise."

Without another word Mark and Linus turned away from this man; and gathering together those who were not swayed by his talk, they made ready for departure.

In a little while a small band of people, bowed beneath heavy burdens, went from the House of the Vine, whispering prayers, making their way to the Tombs.

CHAPTER XXXVI

As they entered the city it seemed to Nero and his companions as if the very wind had become visible, taking on monstrous shapes that like giant red horsemen rode over the valleys and the hills of Rome. Stirred beyond measure, Cæsar halted his escort and, drawing a tablet from his tunic, he wrote down three or four lines of verse. But he did not tarry long, and, setting out again, soon came upon the fringe of the shadow of blood, the edge of the terror. Then, when they drew near the Palatine, Tigellinus wavered, his cheeks became blanched, and he declared that it was folly to go forward as the heat would shrivel them up, or the mob in a frenzy would trample upon Cæsar and pass over him like a wave.

"I am the father of my people," answered Nero; "their peril is my peril. My place is with them in this hour."

As he spoke he was indeed the Emperor, true scion of Julian's house, noble in his brave manhood. And the guard, forgetting his perfumed hair, the actor and the mountebank of another time, looked upon him and loved him, murmuring, "It is not strange that Cæsar is the idol of the common people, their wonder and their god."

But later there came a change. Messengers bade Nero hasten, for the home of authority was in grave peril. So swiftly the little company climbed the Palatine and soon perceived the doom of the Palace of the Cæsars.

It was a crown of golden snakes, the glimmering diadem of Rome.

Gazing upon that molten jewel, Cæsar tore his hair, danced with rage, and then wept like a little child. He was no longer the august Cæsar, the all sheltering, all protecting father of his people.

"Who hath wrought this hideous evil?" he cried. "What enemy hath stabbed me in my very soul? I will have the slaves flogged. I shall find, seize and crucify the miscreants. Here perish priceless treasures of painting, sculpture, the ancient books of Egypt, the rolls of Babylon; here already lie in ashes my poetry and immortal verse. . . ." And thus might Nero have continued

to lament if the captain of the guard had not said that some of those things he valued might yet be saved. He had daring and resolute men at his orders, who would venture into the flames for love of Cæsar, risking life and limb.

Then Nero was comforted, and he quickly issued his commands. Heading twelve men, he sought an entrance in the rear part of the building, walking over red hot pavements and plunging into a pall of smoke. They wrestled with that blinding darkness, choking, gasping, while great beams crashed about them. Some gained an entry and bore back small treasures, paintings, and little figures. But others, amongst them Nero, were driven back baffled, helpless, before the belching black vapour; and in a little while every part of that vast building was alight, flames roaring up, so that it seemed as if these coloured streamers would touch the sky.

Nero had almost fainted; but now the need of the people was uppermost in his mind. Not heeding the counsel of caution given him by his favourites, he hastened down into the ancient city; and when they wavered, showing signs of fear, he said with dignity, "Cowards, risk not your lives with me. Cæsar goes alone, to die if need be, but to be among his people."

In silence the courtiers received the insult, gladly retreating, falling away, leaving their Emperor to go on foot by himself into that crawling ant-heap of stricken creatures, into the very heart of that twining ring of golden light.

And on that afternoon and evening the young man saw much that stirred him to wrath and sorrow—his own soldiers pillaging, men and women raving, driven mad by grief: disorder, confusion, those he had trusted with the city's welfare, traitors in this hour of terror.

Fearless he risked his life again and yet again in those narrow, crooked streets, his face blackened, his hair singed, his tunic shrivelled to the texture of paper by the heat of that roaring furnace. He dragged a woman who was pinned beneath a door from out of a burning house thus saving her from a sure death. And when her husband, a wealthy freedman, promised him gold in plenty as his reward, Nero laughed, saying, "I am Cæsar, who is the guardian of his people and only desires their love as his reward."

With this saying he fled down an ash-clouded alley, leaving the freedman confounded and utterly abashed.

It was time to assert and regulate authority. The hungry mob had plundered shops for bread while honest citizens starved.

Numbers of people with frightful wounds lay unsuccoured on the stones, lost to their kin, left to die slowly and alone, in great agony.

Cæsar gathered together officers, rulers and certain senators. To each man he gave orders, allotting to him his particular task, menacing with death any one of them who failed Rome in this hour. Stores must be brought from Ostia; shelters erected for the homeless in the Campus Martius and in his own gardens; the Pantheon and Baths of Agrippa opened to the people.

So before Nero had ventured into the streets he had laid the first foundations of order and rule. But after he had wandered through the doomed city he was like a man possessed by seven furies of energy, directing all the threads of government, working day and night, sleeping only in snatches or in the heat of noon.

Early on the fourth or fifth morning Tigellinus and Poppæa encountered each other at the door of Cæsar's room. For once these two enemies were united, allied with each other in a common purpose.

There came sounds that told them that Cæsar was stirring within, and Poppæa softly entered and then, beckoning to Tigellinus, bade the slaves withdraw.

When they were closeted alone with Nero, Poppæa spoke in heat and haste. "I have a favour to ask of my lord. Go not into the town to-day. Stay with me here. I need thee and thy music and the assurance of thy love."

"Nay, not now," said Nero. "This is no time for love or music. I must visit each quarter of the town to-day."

"It may well mean death or the overthrow of thine authority," Tigellinus cried suddenly, "if thou dost adventure across the river while the fire still burns, while a crazed people run to and fro and are incited by thine enemies to do thee hurt. Cæsar, I am the bearer of grave tidings. Spies tell me that men who should know better are saying that the Emperor gave orders that Rome should burn, that the prophecy that the last of Æneas's line should be the author of the city's ruin is now being fulfilled."

"It is a false and foul lie," cried Nero.

"Yea; but will they accept thy denial in this hour of calamity?" enquired Tigellinus.

"Conspirators will set upon thee and thine escort and slay thee," lamented Poppæa. "Only death awaits Cæsar in that accursed town."

For a short while Nero doubted and hesitated; and being

uncertain and afraid he turned to a window that gave out upon a wide open space.

The flush of the fire deepened the crimson rose of sunrise; and looking upon it, Cæsar perceived the brightest dawn that had ever lit the Seven Hills that stood like sentinels about that ancient city which now was crumbling, dissolving, passing away.

In the silence, slowly, surely, the dark being—called by Paul “the unlit half of Cæsar’s soul”—shrunk away like a whipped and cringing slave. That other half assumed authority as he flung out his hand, pointing across the river to the blazing town.

“I go into the city to be among my people, without armed escort, and alone. I go to die with them.”

And when Poppæa with tears, and Tigellinus with many earnest words, tried to turn him from this course, he became enraged and told them instantly to be silent; and yielding before a certain majesty of manner rare in this young emperor, they obeyed his will.

But in the hours that followed his departure for the town Tigellinus made secret preparations for flight. He would not be trapped here, in this pavilion, if, on the morrow, another, a usurping Cæsar, ruled.

Poppæa summoned the mage to her. And in a little while she was comforted by his assurance that the Imperial House had never been so firmly established, so free from peril—the stars being all in their favour in this week of ruin and disaster.

“Patience and courage, daughter,” he said. “The fire will shortly be stayed and a good portion of Rome preserved. Then indeed, thy stars prosper, and a great and marvellous city will spring from these ashes. Only trust me and thou wilt rise to a splendour and obtain a power not, so far, known upon this earth.”

CHAPTER XXXVII

NERO did not falter or go back upon the words spoken in the dawn. Hour after hour he walked through the streets, exercising authority, giving orders in the Campus Martius, or planning measures for the safety of the Capitol and Forum; and, at other times, he continued to go on foot and without escort among the people.

Some muttered and looked at him askance. No man greeted him with acclamation, sought to pay court with flattery, or showed concern for his danger. Many of the people were too distracted in mind to recognize their Emperor, or if they did, hardly cared whether he were there or no. A common terror placed all men on the one level, and the common preoccupation of grief or hunger led Cæsar in many streets to pass through crowds unheeded, unobserved.

In an open space among the ruins of a temple that the fire had gutted, three men came suddenly upon Nero, one, a merchant, accosting him.

"Art thou Cæsar?" he boldly inquired.

"Yea," answered Nero, scarcely raising his head, which was bent in thought.

"Then thou art a murderer, for it is through thine orders that Rome burns and many have perished in torment."

"Liar—slave—thou shalt be crucified for this saying," cried the Emperor.

"Nay," said the merchant; "we are here alone, as man to man. Thou canst not now escape thy deserts. I have seen my wife and children die in agony in the fire before my eyes, so shalt thou die." And drawing a dagger from its sheath, he advanced upon Nero warily, watching for a feint, dart, or gesture of defence on the part of his victim.

Then again that day imperial pride disclosed a dignity absent at other times. Cæsar loosened his tunic and bared his breast, saying:

"The guilty man defends himself or flees from his adversary. I am innocent so am not afraid to die. Strike—do thy work well and swiftly."

The man drew near, his arm uplifted. But searching Nero's eyes, he perceived truth in them; and suddenly resolution failed. He faltered and fell back, casting the dagger away, flinging himself at Cæsar's feet, weeping bitterly and crying:

"Pardon—most gracious Cæsar, pardon. I was mad with hunger and sorrow."

And the other two men joined their broken comrade, begging also for mercy.

For a while Nero made no answer, but at last he raised up the man who was grovelling on the earth at his feet, speaking wearily yet without anger.

"Come, follow me and I will procure ye food and money. Your sorrow is my sorrow, your loss my loss. But promise that ye speak of our encounter to no man. It shall remain a secret between us four."

And these three men gave their promise. And when Cæsar commanded an officer in the Campus Martius to give them all that they needed and to find them shelter they marvelled at his clemency and fearless heart. From that hour they worshipped their young Emperor, giving him that love which he won from the people when, through such rare acts, he showed that fineness of spirit which, in another hour, had led Paul to believe that an angel as well as a demon ruled Cæsar. But this meeting and this menace to his life had made him feel ashamed because he had in the past so often desired that Rome should be levelled to the earth, its unsightliness displeasing him. And now he was stricken by the spectacle of so much misery and pain, by the madness that possessed so many of those he had half in jest called his children in a happier time.

Cæsar returned at sunset to his pavilion, and when he had bathed and eaten and was refreshed Poppæa, who had passed hours in preparation for this moment, came to him, saying, "Am I not lovely in thine eyes?"

"No mortal—a goddess," he whispered, gazing at her awe-struck; "thou art lovelier than ever before."

"Then stay with me and forget thy cares."

And because Nero would pay homage to her beauty he stayed, yet half reluctantly. She made him talk, and he told her of

all that had befallen him that day and of how he had braved death and shown mercy to his assailants. But she should keep it as a cherished secret, for the great man tells no one but his beloved of his brave deeds. And like a red-combed cock he strutted before her, rehearsing the scene, and, casting back his ruddy poll again and yet again, with folded arms he faced the executioner.

She applauded, paying him the tribute of flattery he desired. Then, when he would go back to the burning town she tempted him, saying:

"Make a poem of the death of Rome. Place in this lament the hero, Cæsar, and relate the wonders he performed."

Nero remained silent, and he looked out over his gardens and perceived the shelters he had had erected for the outcasts and, beyond them, across the river, that pillar of fire.

"I have shared all with my people," he said; "sorrow, danger, even death. But I will not sing of Cæsar, I will sing of the last days of ancient Rome. That is a good thought of thine, Poppæa. Already words burn within me. I will make a poem that shall be sung till the end of time."

"Immortal words—deathless song," cried Poppæa; "and in the ages yet to come the soldiers will recite thy poem by their camp fires. I see the common people chanting this great lament year after year, age after age; so that though the name of the Emperor, Nero, will be forgotten, the name of the poet, Nero, will be remembered as long as song endures."

Fired by her sayings, Cæsar called to his slave: "My harp—my harp!" And again he strutted like a cock and tossed back his red comb, so that to Tigellinus, who passed in to the banquet-hall before the slave, Nero seemed a subject for laughter, a foolish spectacle. But this favourite contained himself, and he said, "Good tidings, Cæsar. My spies report that the common people do not curse the Emperor. They declare that his corrupt officers, desiring plunder, fired the city while he was away in Antium."

"I care not what they say," cried Nero; "give way, man, give way. Great poetry is in the making. I must go out and seek that tinder which will light the lamp of my imagination."

And with that he seized the harp from the slave and hastened through the rooms until he came to a flight of steps. Running up them, he leaped out upon the roof; and pausing breathlessly—for he had eaten full well—he surveyed the wide stretch

of the world below him and the starry heavens above. At another time it would have been a clear night; but the tapers in the skies burned feebly, their lights dimmed by the nearer, greater glow beside the river, by those masses of smoke that, because of the falling wind, hung like a sombre canopy above the town.

For a while Nero frowned and paced to and fro. Then, as he perceived Poppæa and Tigellinus watching, he took up the harp and, standing, as he believed, in the posture of an ancient statue of Apollo, he began to play and murmur words, and from this murmur there came song.

Suddenly, like a trumpet, his powerful voice pealed out across those gardens and his new and deathless poem sounded in the hearing of the homeless people, who lay in their misery in the shelters scattered about his grottoes and gardens.

They did not gather the words of the poem, but they knew the sound of the voice. They had often listened to it in the theatre. It could not be mistaken, and they whispered one to another, "Cæsar declaims his poem, 'Troy'. Cæsar hath caused Rome to be burned so that he might sing his own verses to the flames. He is actor and mountebank first and Emperor last."

And certain of these people left their shelters and by various ways crossed the river, seeking any of those who might be abroad, telling them of the heartlessness of their Emperor who could see only in the ruin of Rome scenery for his acting, a background for his song.

The story went from mouth to mouth and was twisted into many shapes: some said that Cæsar, in the habit of the actor, was performing in his theatre, heedless of the fate of his people. Others declared that he stood upon Mæcenas's Tower, singing the song of Ilium's capture. And the mob murmured and muttered, and despair, dark and brooding, settled in the hearts of the multitude.

But, inspired by the ardour of creation, Nero sang on easily, tirelessly, while the night advanced and the sea of fire advanced also, reaching almost to the banks of the river Tiber.

It was, indeed, the hour of deepest despair. All hope failed, and the people believed that the whole of Rome would perish, and that before them there lay only ruin and inevitable death.

But the poet was well content. Never had he created such beauty of song. His lament was, he believed, certain of immor-

talities, of that ageless fame which, in his contention, set the artist above and beyond all other men. That night Nero believed Poppæa's saying that he was, indeed, Apollo reigning upon the earth.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

IN those hours of strange bewilderment when the Christians were wholly concerned with the Coming of Christ and the Last Judgment, Mark, a man of single purpose, gave his thoughts to the present time and to his master Peter. For it seemed as if the Apostle's spirit might steal away while he lay in "The House of Eternity", the name given by the Jews to the tombs. But, after a while, he showed signs of life and prayed to be carried into the upper airs. This wish was granted, for already the fire was abating. Away from those crowded, airless caves, the aged man mended. Then, through his stubborn resolution and the power of the Spirit, he was able for a time each day to descend with Mark into the tombs to comfort the sick and shrive the dying. Unlike Hillel, these two did not spare themselves but were selfless, not seeking their own salvation through prayer and the continuous watch for the Last Coming.

After a time the hopes of the Romans revived. Bold measures were taken; gangs of slaves, directed by overseers, demolishing the houses at the foot of the Esquiline. Nero went freely among them, not deserting his post until evening came and the good work was accomplished, the fires stemmed, slowly flickering out.

Soon there only remained from the scourge warm embers, blackened walls where it had passed, and grey ashes which a little wind blew softly, gently, to and fro.

Some people began to count their losses and their dead, but the greater number rejoiced, some even making merry, gaiety and life returned because the terror had passed.

Hillel and his followers were downcast and went about with long faces and the appearance of woe. For Rome, unlike Babylon, had not been destroyed.

The mage watched them from a distance, and presently set two or three men to spy upon them. Then he gave his mind to other matters. He was unsatisfied, and the imperious word of Poppæa still sounded in his hearing. "It is not enough. The palace of Tigellinus remains standing with all its priceless treasure. I am not yet avenged."

"It is not enough," muttered the mage; "for six days it raged; and there shall be rest on the seventh day. But the eighth . . . ?"

Then he recalled the days of his childhood. A little village in the hills, the massacre of the people, his father, mother, brothers and sisters, slain by Roman soldiers mad with the fury of battle. They had slain cruelly, torturing his parents; and the old magician remembered the trembling boy who, from his hiding-place, had watched his mother's agony. So out of this deed of butchery there had come forty years later a great deed of slaughter, the revenge of fire.

"I am not yet wholly avenged," muttered the mage. "For every hour of my mother's pain there shall be a day of woe for the people of Rome, a day of awfulness and of increasing terror."

So he searched for his picked men and spoke of the plunder that might be stolen from the house of Tigellinus; but they must go craftily, wisely, about their work.

Obedying his directions, they first set their glowworm trails among the clustered houses at the north end of the Forum. Then, when these were well alight and the guards and people all occupied with this new outbreak, they hurried to the house of Tigellinus. Those guards, who were at this time sentinels there, received orders to hasten to the Forum, to join their comrades, and to keep order so that another panic should not arise. For panic meant death, the mob running in a frenzy here and there, trampling on each other; even in their madness flinging themselves into the flames.

And two people in Rome knew the ecstasy of vengeance satisfied and the joy of triumph when a great beacon flared up, illuminating the starless night that shrouded the city of Rome.

"The villa of Tigellinus burns," cried Cæsar. "This is the work of my enemies, striking at me through him. No torture is slow enough, cruel enough for such infamous slaves. Treasures of sculpture, painting, priceless gifts of mine all perish. Nothing, indeed, can now be saved. But I shall not rest until these incendiaries are discovered; I shall not rest until I am avenged."

And Poppæa spoke with equal vehemence, loudly lamenting the loss suffered by Tigellinus, while to herself she whispered, "It is enough. At last I may rest. Vengeance is satisfied."

In a crowded room in the Porta Capena, Hillel and his followers slept deeply and soundly, exhausted by fasting and by their long hours of watching and praying in the past six days. It was not until early morning that they were roused by the clamour of the people in the streets and they learned from Tabeel

that, in the darkness, Christ had cast down flaming brands from Heaven which even now were consuming Babylon street by street, temple after temple. The Capitol and the Forum were menaced; the Temple of Hercules would soon be no more. Other places of heathen worship were perishing, and in a little while not one would remain.

So Hillel, followed by Tabeel, Hermes, Philologus, Junias, Hamul, Nereus, and others, went out into that fiery dawn, and again walking in procession, they sang psalms of praise. And when the mage's spies spoke to them, saying, "You are glad because Rome burns?" they answered, "Yea, indeed we are glad; for it is the sign of the end of the world and the resurrection of the faithful. It is the sign that our Lord comes, and the evil of Rome and the earth itself shall pass away."

The spies reported these sayings to the mage, and he told them to hold their peace and to return and watch these men. "When this last fire has been put out rewards will be offered to those who can name the incendiaries," said Joah. "Speak then of what ye know, and ye shall receive a good sum of money and the thanks of Cæsar and all the people of Rome."

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE last flame had been put out by yellow Tiber water. Of the fourteen regions of Rome, three were levelled to the earth and seven damaged and desolated by fire. A world of ashes and a world-weary people who had no heart for laughter or for song; a dark and dour people who spoke openly against Cæsar, some accusing him of many deaths, of many sorrows, of being the cause of the city's ruin. And as for Cæsar, he was listening to Poppæa, who, greater enchantress than ever, was busily embroidering fancy, talking of the new and lovely town that would rise from these ruins. She put into Nero's mind the thought that he should demand of Seneca a portion of his wealth for this purpose. The Emperor was pleased with her counsel that he should pick the golden egg from the old philosopher's nest. But it was hard to speak of it when he and Seneca were together. The words would not come, for Nero respected Seneca as a father and was half afraid of this sage whose advice he had spurned in these last years, when he had satisfied secret lusts, seeking pleasure in the companionship of Tigellinus. So, for a time, the two, the Emperor and his old tutor, talked only of the design for the rebuilding of Rome.

"A multitude of books," said Seneca, "burdens and instructs not him that learns. Twenty thousand books were burned at Alexandria. They were not a worthy monument to kingly riches but a studious excess amassed for the sake of royal pride and vainglory. Let there be no excess of books or works of art gathered for the new city. Collect nothing for ostentation's sake."

"Excess either in books or works of art is," said Nero, suddenly becoming bold, "a lesser offence than excessive wealth. Old miser, thou hast in thy time amassed the largest fortune in the Empire."

Seneca could not deny this accusation, for it was true. But he showed no sign of shame, answering smoothly, "I have come to present my fortune to Cæsar for the rebuilding of Rome."

"Bravely said," cried Nero; "and I will add my wealth to

thine. We will not rest until the last denarius has gone from our coffers."

"Cæsar's will is my will," said the sage, bowing low.

"We must also give ourselves," continued Nero, pleased at the old man's offer. "I shall again follow thy advice. I shall be neither a night owl nor a light shunner. From henceforth I rise with the dawn and, working all the day, I shall design the loveliest city that has ever risen upon this earth. Tigellinus may pass his nights in wine and perfumes. I shall not be of his company."

"He who relinquishes the common day I rank among the dead," answered Seneca; "indeed, how little is he distant from his funeral—existing as he does only by torch and wax light." And the sage continued to utter wise maxims concerning early rising and other noble virtues. But Cæsar had reached an age when he wearied of the long speeches uttered by the old philosopher, whose sayings were soon addressed to empty air. Then, perceiving himself without a pupil, he went heavily, slowly into the antechamber and spoke to his body slave.

"The man who lays down precepts for the governing of life and the moderating of passion obliges human nature not only in the present but in all succeeding generations."

The servant, grey-headed and grey-faced as his master, gazed at him steadily and muttered with a smile, "I am not sure that human nature cares to be obliged."

Many Romans would have had a slave flogged for such an impertinence. But Seneca liked a bold answer, and, sighing, said, "Thine is only a half truth. Those men who are brutes are deaf to wisdom. But I will give thee an instance which proves thine answer to be in part a lie. I am told that a man named Paul of Tarsus peddles my words in the market place. He is a natural orator, and through his fiery vehemence and the utterance of my precepts and those of Epicurus, hath caused the common sort—that is to say, men of title as well as the clouted shoe—to turn from drunkenness and careless living and practice virtue in their stead. But to our philosophy he has added a foolish superstition concerning a Jew who was crucified in Jerusalem. This Jew, Paul declares, is a god and returned from the dead, appearing to his pupils on several occasions. The dead may return as phantoms, but we do not hail them as gods. To be brief, the wise maxims taught by this man, Paul, will be forgotten after his death because he has added to them a tale so superstitious no wise man will credit it in any future time. Men's

minds can only be purified and purged by reason and maxims. Philosophy must not be founded on fable, else it will fail and in no way command the ear or the acts of future generations of men.

"So let us study to preserve ourselves from sadness, fear and secret lusts, ordering our lives by the light of reason and seeking in meditation the good the world and man cannot offer us."

The slave was secretly a follower of Christ. But he made no answer in words, bowing his head as if in assent to these last sayings of Seneca, who was held by the Romans to be the wisest seer in the known world.

After the nine days of fire and ruin Peter and Mark summoned Hillel to their presence. They reasoned with this Gaulonite, but found they could not bridge the gulf between their doctrine and his beliefs. For they might not change this man's fixed nature. He cared not for the moderating of passion and still talked of vengeance and of the wrath of God.

So Peter sent out messengers who summoned all the faithful to a lonely place in the country outside Rome.

That evening, an hour before sunset, a multitude gathered there, and when all were counted and listed the Apostle prayed for guidance. Then, after they had sung a thanksgiving, Peter lifted up his voice, saying:

"Brethren, we are come together not only for worship and thanksgiving, but to determine the future of the Church in Rome. Mark, Linus and I are of accord, and Hillel, who ye all know well, stands apart from us and will not be of us. It is for ye to choose whether Hillel or Linus shall be Overseer of the Roman Church in the coming time. I go shortly to other lands to preach the Word to the people in darkness. But now before I go I name Linus once again Overseer and entreat ye all to obey him and hold him in honour as head of the Roman Church. Hillel has forfeited our trust as a saint and a brother. For in these past days, when fire ravaged Rome, he, and those who followed him, went to and fro, speaking against Cæsar and of the wrath and vengeance of God.

"I would not have ye believe that I lightly judge this man. I have wrestled with him in spirit, I have given up many hours to prayer and meditation concerning his acts and words. But I

am now assured in my mind that he is no follower of Christ. For when the fire raged and Gentiles entreated him to aid them, he refused and would not raise a hand to save a woman who was perishing in the flames, rejecting even the prayers of her sorrowing husband. Our Master bade us love our neighbour and bless our enemies. I ask you, does Hillel's conduct show brotherly love, show even brotherly compassion? This man refused to aid Mark and the brethren when they needed bearers to carry the sick of our community to the shelter of the tombs. He thought only of his own salvation. And again I ask you, is such conduct worthy of a follower of Christ?"

Here the voice of Peter became only a murmur, for he was old and weakness easily overcame him. So Mark, fearing he might lose his hold over the people, now came forward and repeated the last whispered words of the Apostle.

"Our Master commanded us to love one another. But Hillel would have us hate our neighbour, and in his acts has shown that there is neither mercy, compassion, nor love in his heart."

And when Mark would speak further Hillel thrust himself forward, demanding that he should be given a hearing and permitted to answer this accusation. He did not wait for a sign from the Apostle; but spoke swiftly and was, indeed, as a fountain spouting venom. He told the people of the sufferings of the Jews, of how they had been massacred by the Romans. He showed his hatred of this imperial race in words that won the slaves and the Jews who were among his listeners. He spoke of the signs of the end of the world and declared that the fire was the first sign. Others would shortly follow in its wake. Rulers and tyrants would then perish through earthquakes, floods and pestilence. He talked strangely and madly, and yet carried one half of that multitude with him; so that when he called on them to follow him and be his disciples—for he alone would know through the Spirit the hour of the Messiah's coming—many declared themselves for him. And there came shouts of "I am for Hillel, the Gaulonite," or "I am for Simon Peter of Galilee."

There was much uproar and confusion, the gathering breaking up in turmoil; and it was only later, as night fell, that Mark learned that now there was more than division in the Church of Rome. It had been severed in twain. Two churches grew out of one, and their members were known as "the Galilæans" and "the Gaulonites" from that day of division that followed the fire.

CHAPTER XL

AFTER fleeing from the old philosopher, Nero talked to builders and artists, living in a happy dream as his words shaped the images of the future.

"I shall raise up a wondrous town unequalled in past times by any in Babylonia, Egypt, Chaldea, or Greece—broad streets, noble colonnades, shaded walks, open squares, white fountains, and each house separated from its neighbours by a passage way; such is the general design. And in the heart of Rome I shall build a golden palace set in a great park, which will be divided into meadows, woods and gardens and shall contain lakes and streams. Greece must yield up treasures of art; the mines shall disgorge precious stones. Painters, sculptors, and the finest artists in the known world are at my command to make of this palace a thing of beauty for worship by the coming generations."

"It is the vision of a poet," one said.

"And the poet's vision is the best of all," added another.

"When that poet is our immortal Cæsar," swiftly countered a third flatterer.

But even as he spoke Nero was summoned by a secret sign made by Tigellinus, who had come hastily into that hall. Now this sign indicated urgent matters of state. So, though provoked at his happiness being shadowed, Nero passed through the crowd about him and went with his favourite into a small ante-chamber.

"Bad news, Cæsar," muttered Tigellinus, not waiting for his word. "All the people are murmuring against thee. They repeat the accusation that the Emperor caused the city to be laid in ashes so that he might build a new and splendid Rome."

"Liars, infamous fools," cried Nero.

"It is not a time for words," answered Tigellinus. "Thou shouldst on the instant have the officers of law summoned and counsel taken for the holding of an inquiry into the matter. Verily, Cæsar, I fear for thy throne if thou dost not act with speed and make it known that thou art innocent and a zealous seeker for the enemies who set the town in a blaze."

Now Nero could act swiftly once he was roused out of either

his verse-making or his dreams concerning music and art. Messengers were sent to and fro. In the heat of noon lawyers and guards assembled to debate and inquire into the mystery of the fire.

At that time, with Cæsar occupied, Poppæa was free to seek out the guilty author of the city's ruin. She was glad with a fierce gladness as she entered the dungeon in which the mage wove his spells. She came, indeed, to offer him her praise and thanks and said, while he greeted her, taking both her hands, "Master, I am happy because Nero has been given back to me. Now he is wholly mine. I can ask all favours in reason save one and they will be granted to me. And I am glad, yea, and more than glad. For presently, will not this evil man, Paul of Tarsus, and his followers be arrested and given up to justice?"

"This evening my spies lay their reports before the officers of the guards."

"But Cæsar holds inquiry now."

The mage smiled. "Daughter, it is ever an error in such matters to strike too soon. I have planned that these spies shall come with their news like common men, and not in a body, so that it will not seem to be planned. But be assured that this night Paul of Tarsus and his friends will be denounced."

"I fear and hate this man," muttered Poppæa; "and my pleasure is great at the thought of his taking. A year or more ago the High Priest promised me his blessing if I would cause Paul to be taken up, judged and executed. He told me that I was the instrument of God, and that such an act would lead to forgiveness of all my sins. And when I count and look over the days of my past life I am often afraid. But now I shall be justified; now I shall win the blessing of the High Priest and of God. So I offer these thanks from my heart."

Then the mage bade Poppæa be seated, and this proud Empress chose to place herself at his feet and to gaze reverently up at him as he spoke to her in grave sentences.

"Daughter, thou hast opened thy mind to me, so I will also speak freely." And he told her of his early life and the story of the slaying of his brothers, sisters and father, and of his mother's torture, the torment of her end.

"Since that time," said Joah, "I have never known peace. My mother's shade cannot rest or give me rest. Ceaselessly she walks the earth, crying for vengeance. My nights were haunted by her spirit until I satisfied it with the vow that for every hour of her pain I would exact a day of agony from the citizens of

Rome. I prepared myself for the fulfilment of this task by studying magic. I gave myself to it, and my life was passed in fasting, study of the awful mysteries, and in the practice of the ancient rites, so that I might win the immortal powers to my side. Through them I raised thee up to the throne; through them thy beauty has been preserved, the loveliness that bewitched Cæsar and gives thee rule over him."

"And will it continue, master?" she whispered.

"If our trust is maintained," he answered, and then continued, "Through these immortal powers I have exacted those days of agony from the Roman oppressors; through them the debt is at last paid: and believe me or not, as you will, on the ninth day of the fire my mother's shade ceased from haunting me, ceased from wandering to and fro, and has gone into the silence and the peace of the grave. So, daughter, vengeance is satisfied; and as thou hast won gladness of heart and a freed mind, I, too, have won a treasure beyond all other treasures—inviolable peace."

"Inviolable peace," she murmured. "A strange desire?"

"Not for one who is a seer," he answered. "For this inviolable peace will give me strength, grant me wings which will take me into the farthest corners of the firmament. Thus fortified, I am greater than Cæsar and Seneca. But I shall not only live for the delights of that invisible world in which I can now roam at will. I shall also live to aid thee in ruling Cæsar, and so govern the world."

"In the Ides of October year, thou mayest bear a son to Cæsar. For the danger to thee written in the scroll of the stars will by then have passed away. But obey me and there is no danger. Lastly, I would have thee consider well the nature of the power that has been granted us. Through it we can avert calamity from our people in Judæa. Through it we shall cause them to live free from oppression, and so living, they will be prosperous and at peace."

CHAPTER XLI

A STRANGE motley gathering of prisoners stood in the dread presence of Cæsar in the imperial court. Many of them were slaves, and the greater number were ill-clad, dark men of the East with lean, scarred bodies, who had known only poverty and the humiliations of poverty in their lives, with here and there a smooth-faced better dressed Roman and a fair barbarian from the north. All, whatever their race, were somewhat bewildered and troubled, not knowing with what offence they were to be charged. Four white-robed women, gracious and dignified, Eustachia, Mary the tire-woman of Pomponia, Claudia¹ and Melanie, stood a little apart from the huddled herd of prisoners whose leaders and spokesmen were Patrobas,² Hillel and Junia.³ Last of all, Tabeel, who had the gift of prophecy, came in between the guards; and there were red weals on his flesh where the guards had beaten him. As he passed by the women he whispered: "Be of good cheer, sisters; we are all swiftly journeying to the country of the dead, and beyond it lies our home in paradise."

When Cæsar had taken his seat upon the rostrum and silence had been enjoined, a lawyer opened the proceedings, asking for witness and declaring the nature of the charge.

Then, one by one, the spies of Joah came and testified against the prisoners. They lied in saying that these men and women had twice—once near the Circus Maximus and later beside the Forum—set fire to the town. It was strange, indeed, but only Joah knew that the incendiaries themselves were now accusing these innocent prisoners of their own crime. But in other matters these crafty fellows told in part the truth, saying that the prisoners had refused to aid the citizens in putting out the flames; and again they uttered no lie when they swore that these people had rejoiced at the sight of the flames and had raised no hand to save those who were perishing in them—at least this was true of Hillel and his wild followers.

Now Patrobas, a gentle soul who loved Peter, was first called

¹ Not wife of Pudens.

² Romans xvi. 14.

³ Romans xvi. 7.

because he had the air of a man of parts and of authority. There was in his voice a quality of breeding that held the court and favoured his cause.

"It is true," he said, "that we all belong to one community and that we worship God, and Jesus of Galilee who was Son of God, and who came to earth to redeem men from their sins."

"Then are ye all Galilæans?" inquired a judge.

"Call us Galilæans if you will," said Patrobas, looking at Hillel. "One name is as good as another."

So, in this time of persecution, all the saints came to be known to the Romans as Galilæans; and they gloried in the title because of their Master being of Galilee.

And Patrobas resumed, "But we are innocent of the charge made against us by these common men who are without name or standing in Rome. We did not set fire to the city, and we can prove that this accusation be false. For if any among you have ever listened to our teachers you will know that it is contrary to our faith in Jesus, the Christ, to perform deeds of violence. Christ commanded us to be obedient to our rulers, to lead sober and chaste lives and to love our neighbour, respecting him and not coveting his possessions. Surely then, observing such teaching, we cannot be guilty of seeking plunder and striving to despoil our neighbours by firing their homes."

Other wise and helpful things were said by Patrobas, and the judges were beginning to doubt the testimony of Joah's spies when Hillel was summoned and questioned. Once this hairy, ragged man, with his crazed eyes and fierce manner, began to speak, there came a change over that court. Even Cæsar, who had had a listless air, sat up straightly—all eagerness and anger as he listened to the increasing flood of ill-spoken words that flowed from the lips of the Gaulonite.

"We did not set the town on fire," he declared; "it was Jesus, the Son of God, who caused His angels to cast down flaming brands from the heavens, to draw fire from the stars to burn and destroy Rome. O ye Romans, filthy and abominable are your works. Wherefore our Lord determined that your city should be consumed."

"It is true then," questioned a judge, "that you Galilæans fired the city?"

"As I have said our Lord avenged the sufferings of the poor and the oppressed by burning up the temples of your false gods, by destroying the palaces which are the dwellings of harlots, by demolishing the amphitheatres in which men die for your

sport and laughter. Our God is the friend of the poor and the slaves and presently will raise them up and cast down the mighty from their seat. The end of the world is at hand, and some who are believers in Christ rejoice at the burning of Rome, for it is the first sign of the end. We would not aid those who were perishing as these men have testified; because it was well that the Romans should die and no longer continue committing abominable sin, filthy in the sight of Jesus, the Son of God. Verily, the fire of Rome was sweet as the smoke of sacrifice to our God. Cæsar, thou dost now sit in majesty and art hailed as ruler of the world. But presently thou wilt be in the dust, lower than the beggar, and because of the evil of thy life thou wilt be cast into outer darkness, remaining there in torment for all eternity."

At this point one guard smote Hillel and another clapped his hand upon his mouth, and he was dragged away into a corner. Only because Nero had made signs had he been permitted to speak for so long. There had been much murmuring against him among the officers and people who thronged the court.

Now, white with wrath, Cæsar rose from his seat. At first he spoke with such heat few could catch the sense of his violent words. But after a while he gained command of himself and his meaning became clearer as his fury became tempered by a desire to show the fairness of Roman justice and to overwhelm the court with a sense of the iniquity of the prisoners' crime.

"It is plain," he said, "that all who confess they are Galilæans confess that they are members of a society which is revolutionary and has as its purpose not only plunder, but the destruction of the Empire. These outcasts speak of the End of the World which they believe is near and think that by striking at Rome, they will bring about the end of her world dominion. Here then is plot and foul conspiracy against all men and nations who enjoy peace and prosperity because we Romans govern the world. I will not now speak of my private losses, or of the loss of my dear friend Tigellinus in the destruction of his palace. But I perceive that by striking at Tigellinus these Galilæans hoped to strike at Cæsar. Then, by levelling to the earth the homes of our people, it was their intention to cause such confusion that anarchy must ensue. For such infamy, for such hatred of Rome and of our gods, whom they blaspheme, there is no torment slow enough, no torture agonizing enough as will punish them sufficiently for the evil, the misery and the ruin of which they are the cause."

Here Cæsar paused from very weariness, for the heat was heavy at that hour. An officer whispered in his ear, calling to his mind the procedure in Roman justice which ordains that every man, however lowly, who is accused, shall be permitted to say a few words in his defence. Then, one by one, the prisoners¹ were led before the judges, and none failed their Master, all confessing that they were the servants of Jesus of Galilee and believed in His Godhead. Not even the women faltered; making a good confession, each in turn uttering the words spoken by Patrobas.

"I worship the one true God and Jesus of Galilee who was Son of God, and who came to earth to redeem men from their sins."

Only three or four of these Galilæans showed signs of terror and despair at the sight of the awful countenance of Cæsar, at the wrath and muttered menaces of the people of the court. Yet, though some might stumble over their words, they bravely declared that they were the children of Christ and were innocent of the offence with which they were charged. And when the last had spoken there came a babel of voices, appealing for the torture and death of the accused.

Such noisy behaviour was unknown in Cæsar's court. But soon silence was compelled, the people sinking back into their seats. Then Nero rose to pronounce sentence, and he was weary, his head ached, and he was afraid. For the dark faces of these men of the east conjured up visions of a people who had studied magic and sought through its baleful power to attack and overthrow the Empire. So, speaking hoarsely, his hands quivering from his secret fear, Cæsar addressed the court.

"These prisoners are guilty of a crime unequalled in the past troubled history of Rome. It remains, therefore, for us only to determine the nature of their punishment. Death is too good for them. But such spawn of the demons may not, because of their danger to the commonweal, remain alive upon this earth. They have destroyed two amphitheatres; but we shall find a place where they will offer us sport, yea and the laughter of which one of them has spoken, where they will be torn limb from limb by wild beasts. Others may be reserved for the cross. Even crucifixion is too soft and easy an end for them. So my councillors will devise some torment that will increase their suffering a thousandfold and increase our enjoyment. I have ever sought to practise justice; and to-day Rome rules the world

¹ "Among them Olympus, Philologus, Tertius, Marcus, Trebellius."

because all nations and peoples know that they can obtain justice from us. In thus condemning these men and women to frightful torture I am voicing the fair spirit of Roman Law, avenging the sufferings of our people, and making these offenders an example for all time. So fearful shall be this example no one will dare to become a member of this abominable society of magicians at any future time. So they will perish off the face of the earth and the peace of Rome be preserved from their foul conspiracy in the coming years."

With one voice the people in that court acclaimed Cæsar's speech. Even those among them of integrity and virtue, had no doubts and held that this was a just sentence and the prisoners were only receiving their deserts.

CHAPTER XLII

NOW when Nero was seventeen he loved Acte, a Greek slave, with a boy's love; that is, with all his heart. He gave her her freedom and caused a genealogy to be devised which stated that she was a descendant of Attala king of Pergamum. Then he roused the fury of his mother, Agrippina, by declaring that he would marry Acte and raise her to the Imperial throne. And he said to Seneca, "The joy of all the world shines through her eyes, and there is only beauty in her soul." But the wise Spaniard smiled and shook his head, answering, "The pretty saying of a poet . . . I would recall to Cæsar's memory the decree of the immortal Augustus. No emperor may marry a woman who is not freeborn. For the nations under his rule would then have contempt for him and the safety of throne and empire must be imperilled."

But Nero would have none of this. So Seneca bided his time, causing Acte to be placed in the charge of his friend, Annæus Serenus, and given a great house in Rome. Nero visited her each day, living with her until love died. When he had reached the age of twenty no trace of his passion remained for the little Greek slave girl; and this broke her heart. Yet, of all the women in the Emperor's life only Acte loved him for himself and not as did others for his wide possessions and his imperial power. She never gave herself or her love to any other man, remaining faithful to Nero until death. She caused a shrine to be raised to Ceres, mother earth, hoping that she might through the favour of the goddess win back her lost love. And when she perceived that this device had failed she sorrowed secretly, but never at any time reproached Nero for his rejection of the one innocent and lovely thing offered him in his reign. Later she came to know Stachys, and he told her of Paul and Christ. His words bore healing to her and the peace that is better than love.

Acte and Poppæa were called Nero's good and evil angels. Poppæa feared Acte, and this fear took the form of jealousy, so that at one time she caused this simple and humble woman to be banished from the court to Velitrae. But after a while Cæsar commanded her return, overriding Poppæa's objections and

allaying her fears by assuring her that he no longer felt any love for Acte, whose lack of beauty made him value his wife's beauty the more.

Now these words were not true of Acte; though, indeed, her prettiness was as the light of a candle dip to a star when compared with the splendid looks of Poppæa. But this saying appeased the Empress.

It was hard to make war upon Acte. For she was a Christian before she had ever heard of Christ. There are some people, pure and peerless, wholly innocent of mind from their birth. Acte was of this kind; she was incapable of speaking evil of any man or woman and always praised Poppæa's beauty when Cæsar talked to her. In the matter of Poppæa's vices she remained silent.

So, as time went by and Tigellinus became more and more a cause for fear, Poppæa ceased from thinking of this other woman, and gave her mind to perfecting the plot which would bestow on her supreme power.

Stachys was a member of Cæsar's household, and daily he visited Acte, speaking to her of Christ. She was not baptized, but she was delighted in hearing of the truths taught by Paul of Tarsus, and she kept all these in her heart. For she loved Cæsar and knew that it was dangerous to speak of what was wholly opposed to his manner of life. Always he came first with her, and she desired nothing from him save the pleasure of those rare times when he might pass an hour in her company.

Now Poppæa roused and stirred Nero, but Acte could soothe and calm him when he was fretful and provoked. In the hour when he was resting after his bath on the evening following the first trial of the saints, he caused her to be summoned. She came and stroked his brow, and there was healing for his spirit in her fingers. After a while he lay back sighing, grateful for the kindness of her touch and her gentle voice, and he said, "The aches of my mind and body are gone. Terror of sleepless destiny is no longer mine. It is thy doing, Acte."

"It is my pleasure, Cæsar," she answered, "as thou knowest to share thy fears with thee."

"Mother Acte," he said softly, "I was greatly troubled all this day, for we have discovered another nest of conspirators, and their intention has been to overthrow me and the Empire. These conspirators are named Galilæans. They serve a demon whom they call Christ, and, according to the testimony of one of them this Christ, through some mystery of magic, flung flaming brands

out of the skies that lit the houses in the valleys of Rome, starting this monstrous fire."

"Nay, Cæsar," answered Acte; "I cannot believe in such magic. The man who told thee this tale was mad and could not have known the meaning of his wild words."

"That may be so," said Nero; "but it was shown at the trial of these Galilæans that they had fired Rome—of that there was certain proof. All my life I have lived in danger from conspiracy, and the conspirators increase in number and in craft in these last years. So I am to be pitied; for in spite of my greatness I am lonely on my throne. And what can still the terror in my heart on such a day as to-day when I meet again with these enemies who hate me and seek to destroy me and mine?"

Then Acte spoke comforting words and again she stroked Cæsar's brow. And after a time he was at peace—refreshed, comforted by the radiance of her spirit.

"Thou hast cured my aching head," he said; "and driven away fear with thy serenity. Ask of me a favour and I shall be pleased to grant it—any jewel thou desirest shall be thine."

"Jewels give me no pleasure," she answered; "but if Cæsar is gracious he will grant an audience to the freedman, Stachys, who waits in the court, and is the bearer of tidings of grave import to Roman justice."

"I had liefer give thee a jewel than see this fellow. But bid him enter."

Then Stachys was summoned. And having saluted Cæsar, he spoke in haste and in low tones, telling him that he had discovered the true author of the mischief wrought in Rome. "A mage named Joah," he said, "hired certain men to set the city in a blaze. Two who were honest and upright fled from Rome. Now they have returned and are prepared to bear witness against Joah who is from Syria, and, hating Cæsar, brought this calamity upon us to satisfy his horrible malice."

The weary Nero was displeased at thoughts of the day's doings being roused up again. And he protested: "But one of these Galilæans uttered treason and defied me, Cæsar, his judge."

"He was mad," murmured Acte. "These Galilæans are innocent. I implore thee at least to look into their case and not permit them to be crucified until the whole matter has been sifted."

Then Nero caused a councillor to be summoned who was one of Poppæa's spies, and he made Stachys repeat his accusation against the wizard Joah.

The councillor considered it for a while in silence, and then said slowly, "Stachys has been misled and is not acquainted with the evidence given at the trial to-day. Several of the prisoners on examination admitted that a Jew named Simon Peter was their leader. Now it is well known that the Jews have secret knowledge of the arts of magic. Our honest friend here has only been mistaken in the name. It is this mage Simon and not Joah who is the head of the conspiracy. May I call to Cæsar's mind that Joah holds the place of astrologer to the Empress? He receives many favours from her and Cæsar. Why, then, should he plot against imperial power, for in overthrowing it he would overthrow himself?"

The lawyer's argument satisfied Nero. He dismissed Stachys and would not listen to the pleadings of Acte, sulkily saying when she lingered that it might be well for her health if she sought the sea air and journeyed to Velitrae.

So Stachys failed, and his bold petition only increased Nero's fury against the saints, causing him to pass the evening in devising exquisite tortures and a spectacle for the people unequalled in the annals of Rome.

Acte retired to her house to pass the night in prayer. The freed-man wandered through the ruins of Rome scarcely heeding where his footsteps strayed, so hard was his grief for the prisoners, so filled with apprehension was his soul for the morrow.

Near the river's edge three men in dark cloaks leaped out upon him from behind a broken wall. Their daggers quickly ended his noble life, and with curses and laughter, they flung his body into the Tiber.

But in the days that followed the story of the mage who had fired Rome went from mouth to mouth, taking many different shapes. It was said amongst the Christians that a man named Simon, the mage, had lit the fire in order to bring persecution upon them and to destroy the Church. In later times numbers of tales were written relating the conflict between the mage Simon and Peter; and none knew that these were idle imaginations, that their source lay in the name of Simon Peter and in a lawyer's crafty, quibbling words.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE shadows of their dreams drive the people of power mad, and so it was with those strange beings, Nero, Poppæa and Joah. For too long they had lived outside the world, not mixing with common men and women. Never had they mingled with the crowd on an equality of speech and thought. At no time were they of them, knowing that touch of nature which would have preserved them from ghastly deeds and their own monstrous fantasy.

The suspicion of Cæsar in the people's mind was removed when they learned of the trial and conviction of the Galilæans. One grey-eyed morning Nero was applauded by thousands as he passed through Rome. Rarely had such cheering fallen to his lot, and he was triumphant, saying to Tigellinus, "I am like a conqueror returning to my people. Nay, more than a conqueror, for through observing the fair spirit of justice I have won all the people's hearts."

That day the Galilæans were sown into the coats of animals and driven before a great multitude of Romans who howled and hissed at them shouting: "Robbers, assassins, magicians, traitors to the Empire and the gods." Some of these—poor and ignorant slaves—were filled with fear and, stumbling, fell. Others held on bravely. Patrobas, of a fine height and noble bearing, led the band.

At last the bawling ceased—the people silent and trembling with pleasure in the moment before dogs and other beasts were loosed. Then Patrobas lifted up his face, and looking towards Cæsar's high seat, cried out a prayer for Cæsar's soul. Few words were heard; for the enraged mob, believing them to be a magician's spell, bellowed and shouted again. And the shouting changed to laughter when a pack of wild dogs chased and attacked the Galilæans, worrying and tearing at their limbs, pulling out their entrails, slowly and horribly devouring them. But Melanie, as Dirce, her naked body lashed to the horns of an angry bull, gave the greatest pleasure of all. She perished very slowly, as the beast tossing his head and charging round the

arena caused the crowd to applaud again and again, delighting as they did in the bruising and the torment of that white flesh.

Afterwards, when the ground was a mess of blood, bones and dust, the crier invited the people to Cæsar's gardens at nightfall.

It was a still, beautiful evening. Never before had the stars looked down on such a spectacle. The Galilæans, in tunics of pain—a garment smeared with oil and wax—were fastened to crosses. Men ran to and fro, setting them alight. So when the people flowed in crowds into the gardens they perceived avenues of human torches, smouldering, flickering, blazing up according to the nature of the oiled and waxed garments. And along these illuminated ways Nero drove his chariot, displaying his skill with the horses and crying out delighted greetings to his subjects. But the crowd remained silent, hanging their heads as Cæsar, in the charioteer's habit, careered and played the mountebank before this spectacle of incredible agony. Some men and women vomited and turned away; and a great number were troubled by a cruelty that distressed even hardened bullies. Only a few acclaimed Cæsar; and discontented at the absence of fervour in their applause, he dismounted from his chariot and in the company of Tigellinus he wandered here and there among the crosses, mocking and gibing at his victims. One who could still speak, answered him:

"We perish, but we triumph, Cæsar. Our tunic of torment is the robe of victory."

And in that time a demon possessed Nero, causing him to add to the pain of the martyrs by various subtle devices that led their bodies to burn more slowly, their torture to be lengthened for an hour or more. Even so, Cæsar was not satisfied. Remembering ravaged Rome he gave orders that a diligent search should be made for the Galilæans, and any people who confessed to a belief in Jesus were to be instantly condemned by a magistrate. Cæsar hungered for more victims, longed for the pleasure he received from witnessing their sufferings. So the prisons were soon filled with the poor and the slaves—believers in Christ who would not deny Him when questioned, prepared and glad indeed to die in lingering torments. For they knew then that, delivered from this body of clay, they would be with Christ which was far better.

Neither Peter nor Mark had been taken up by the officers of the law. For some days Peter lay sick in the house provided by Pomponia Græcina; and from his bed he dictated to the scribe, Silvanus, letters to be dispatched to Paul and to the heads of the

churches in Asia and in Greece. These, in guarded words, told of the persecution and were exhortations to the brethren to hold fast to their faith if, as might well be, the persecution spread throughout the Roman world.

In that hour Peter assumed the leadership of the whole Church, accepting thus the place once held by James and offered to him by Paul of Tarsus. When he could rise and walk again the remnant of the Galilæans were summoned to a larger room and Peter greeted them with words of gladness and of consolation. And in that hour of despair and terror the aged Apostle opened the proceedings with a prayer called "The Great Thanksgiving," adding to it sentences of his own.

"Lord of sun, moon and stars, we render thanks to Thee. Lord of the first three elements, heaven, earth and air, we utter our praise. Lord of birth, life and death, we render Thee homage, praising Thy Name, the One and only God. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, Three in One. Creator of everything that lives and moves, we worship Thee and give thanks that Thou hast brought us to this day, guarding us from the perils that surround us, preserving our lives as we journey along the dark ways of earth. We, Thy children in Christ, bless Thee for having bestowed on us the knowledge of our Saviour, of His Holy Life, His Sacrifice, upon the Tree, so that we should be saved and redeemed from the sin of Adam, from the transgression of Eve.

"We Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, abide within the fold of the Great Shepherd, and though of divers nations, of divers states of life we are one in the thanksgiving we offer Thee, one in love, one in faith and charity. Wherefore all the days of our earthly journeyings we serve and do render honour to Thy Name.

"And we vow that neither the torment of fire, of the cross, nor the menace of wild beasts, shall turn us from the worship of the One true God. Neither the Prince of the Air, nor principalities and powers shall prevail and win from us denial of the Name above every name. Glory to It. Amen."

Twice all those present spoke these last sentences after Simon Peter, and not one among them faltered. Uplifted by the sayings and the faith of their father in Christ, they were prepared to face the perils of their dark destiny and were fearless, receiving, as they ate of the bread and drank of the wine, the spirit of a peace which could not be disturbed or taken from them.

Afterwards Pomponia, who was known as Lucinia among the Galilæans, told Peter of her plan that he should be secretly conveyed to a lonely place among the northern lakes where he might hide in safety from the officers of the law. "This persecution cannot continue for long," she said. "The citizens of Rome will, in time, be revolted by it. So it is needful that thy life should be preserved for the day when thou canst once more gather together the remnant and again build up a Church in Rome."

And those elders who were present, including Mark, prayed Peter to agree to this plan for his safe keeping. He said he would liefer die with the brethren. But they told him that in this matter he must put himself last and the good of the Church first.

So, being gentle and easily persuaded that others were wiser than he, the Apostle consented to go secretly from Rome on the following evening and to remain in northern Italy until such time as he might return openly to the capital to continue his work.

CHAPTER XLIV

LUCINIA'S servants brought news that the guards were searching through the town for Simon Peter. So it was determined that in disguise at nightfall he should set out on foot and alone, meeting a carriage a little distance from Rome which would convey him northwards to a sure hiding-place.

The Apostle was very sorrowful, for all his desire was to die and be with Christ. But the brethren were glad, and Lucinia could not rest so long as this life beyond price was in danger of death.

An hour before his departure Peter told Mark, scene by scene, of the time when Jesus was taken and he followed Him to the palace of the High Priest. He waited there through the long night, the hours passed slowly, heavily, and he was sick with fear. In turn two women questioned him, and twice he denied all knowledge of Christ. And shame was added to shame; for when he was questioned a third time he began to curse and to swear, saying, "I know nothing of this Galilæan ye call Jesus."

The memory of that denial had followed him through the years, was with him now, reproachful as ever in the lonely hour. Thrice he had denied. Was this the fourth occasion of denial?

Mark talked of the needs of the saints, the living came before the dying and the dead; he spoke comforting words. But they seemed to pass by his silent listener unheeded.

Later a solitary old man leaning upon a staff, with slow and uncertain tread, walked along the Appian Way. But in the gate Christ met him and made to pass into the city. "Lord, whither goest thou?" he asked. And Christ answered, "I come to be crucified a second time." Wherefore Peter knew that Christ must be crucified a second time in His little servant.

Doubt and sorrow vanished even as the Master seemed to vanish like a dream. Peter turned back upon the road and came again to Lucinia's house. The Apostle, in spite of his seventy years, had the innocence of a little child. His face was radiant as he greeted the brethren, and he was astonished that they still mourned when he had told them of what he had seen and that Christ must be crucified a second time in His little servant. That

very evening he gave himself up to the guards, and on the morrow was taken before a magistrate; not permitted to speak after his confession, and summarily condemned.

Two days later Simon Peter hung upon a cross in Nero's garden. Mark, Linus and a veiled, weeping woman stood afar off. And, because Lucinia could not endure to witness close at hand the sufferings of this aged man, Mark and Linus left her in the charge of two of the Galilæans and drew near to Peter.

Now the crosses were not all full that night. As a centurion had said to the magistrate, "We have gathered only a poor bag of Galilæan foxes on these last days, for they have taken to holes in the hills." And this was true, the few remaining Christians having fled from the town. For they would liefer die of starvation among the mountains or of fever in the marshy plains than face the anger of guards and citizens, the torment of the fiery cross.

No man had been bound to a tree which faced the tree on which Peter hung. Both Mark and Linus perceived that it was empty as they drew so close to the Apostle's shrivelling body they might hear his whispered words.

"Paul of Tarsus has come; he has been with me all the day—is with me now. We shall be together. . . ." Here the voice faltered. But at the last it seemed to whisper again, "We shall be together this very night in Paradise."

Then the flames leaped up brightly; and Mark and Linus drew back from their terrible glow. In so doing they perceived that, upon the empty cross, there hung a shape of light. Little recking that it was the celestial body of Paul of Tarsus which had traversed mountains and seas to be with Simon, his brother, they believed that the saint had come secretly to Rome, was arrested, and now burned, a pure white flame strange indeed beside the horrid, crawling, yellow and blue fires that wound like serpents round the perishing men and women.

The hearts of these two Galilæans were broken by the thought that they had lost all in thus losing the two Apostles who had guided the ship of the Church through the years.

During the night they told four or five of the faithful, who gathered together to pray, that Paul of Tarsus had passed to his rest on the same day as Simon Peter. They were sure of it, for they had seen them burning slowly, cruelly, and yet, while the shrivelled body of one saint remained after the fire had died out, the body of the other had vanished—not even a heap of ashes marking the place where he had perished.

Then Silvanus wrote down a record of the end of Peter and Paul. And in the dawn he carried this roll with other rolls to the tombs outside Rome. He hid these writings beneath a heavy stone in one of these caves, placing a sign over it. And after that he, as others, fled to the hills.

But Mark and Linus remained in the city. No fear of the cross could move men with broken hearts.

CHAPTER XLV

“THE body is irrational and may be galled, tortured and burnt; but the rational part is fearless, invincible and unshaken.” Such were Seneca’s words when he witnessed the sufferings of the Christians. But as the months went by, and the persecution continued, the sage, in spite of his habit of serenity, was greatly troubled by the cruelties practised, and he tried to console himself by saying: “Death is the wish of some, the relief of many and the end of all. It sets the slaves at liberty, carries the banished man home and places all mortals on the same level. Life itself were punishment without it.” And he added, sighing, “When I see tyrants, violence, tortures, the prospect of death is a consolation to me and the only remedy against the injuries of life.”

Now Pomponia was only secretly a follower of Christ. But that morning, greatly daring, she had confided in Seneca’s wife and pleaded with her to use her influence to have mercy shown to the Galilæans. So this good woman answered her husband’s maxims with a quick challenge.

“By saying nothing thou art consenting to tyranny and violence.”

“Thou speakest in riddles,” said the sage.

“My meaning is plain. Go now to Cæsar and tell him that this persecution of the Galilæan sect must cease. It is thy duty not to plead but to demand mercy for these men and women who are, I am told, poor and ignorant slaves.”

“In these last years Nero has always set aside my counsel. The will of Tigellinus is his will. Desiring peace and quiet for my meditations I vowed I would give up the vain task of advising Cæsar.”

“There can be no peace and quiet when men suffer and die as these suffer and die.”

Seneca did not answer her. But that evening he sought audience with Nero and found him vexed and discontented.

“Cæsar,” said the old tutor; “I have come to ask a return for my fortune.”

"Men weary me with requests. I am pestered by them all the day," answered Nero; "well, what of it?"

"I require mercy of thee. Thou art a poet and vowed to the service of beauty. So long as this hideous persecution continues all beauty is soiled; and thou dost dishonour thy name as a poet. These Galilæans have been sufficiently punished. Leave them in peace. Command that the officers of the law cease from hunting them out and giving them up to the torturers."

"But these Galilæans are a society of magicians. So long as they continue they will seek to put spells and curses on me and mine."

"No wise man believes in spells and curses," answered Seneca; "he believes only in good will. These slaves and outcasts will come in time to bless thee, if now thou art merciful. Persecution never destroys, and in this case will only strengthen the hands of thine enemies."

Suddenly Nero changed in his manner, softening and saying, "Thy request is granted. To-morrow I shall give orders that no more Galilæans are to be arrested. Only if they come and give themselves up as some have done shall they be judged and condemned."

"My thanks, Cæsar," answered Seneca; "I am content."

"Now thou must pay me in kind for this favour," said Nero; "I require the remainder of thy fortune which thou hast so far withheld. Also I require that thou dost reason with certain of my stubborn subjects. Some of those fools make a loud noise and declare that they want the old crowded Rome with its smells and twisted, narrow streets. They complain that their health will suffer if the avenues are broad, if there are wide squares and houses built apart from each other. Reason with these citizens, old friend, and cure them of their obstinate beliefs. Then I shall be free to continue my work as architect of a greater Athens. For I am determined to raise up a town in the Greek style, but fairer than any Greek city."

Seneca complied with Cæsar's request; and Cæsar honoured the bargain by causing the open persecution of the Galilæans to cease not only in Rome, but in other parts of the Empire. He was not naturally a cruel man; and now that he was happy designing his Golden House and directing the builders he cared no longer for punishment and the pleasure of vengeance. Also he saw little of Tigellinus, his days being devoted to work and his nights to Poppæa. She came more and more to rule him

in the affairs of State and the world—the mage directing her decisions so craftily all enemies seemed to be put under her feet.

But there were many enemies of Cæsar. The citizens condemned the emptying of the coffers of the State for the building of the Golden House and a vast and magnificent Rome. They perceived that this would lead to grave discontent in the Empire through high taxes and gross exactions. The patricians hated Cæsar because, they declared, he played the mountebank and thus brought the last shame upon Rome. Commenting on these public exhibitions, Natalis said to Seneca :

“An Emperor may not play the mummer. Whatever his offences in his private life he may not in public offend against the dignity of his office. He should be the symbol of nobility and integrity, for he is the symbol of the State. The State is degraded if his office is subordinated to his own private concerns and pleasures.”

“On the stage of the world,” said Piso, “all men are mummies. But the ruler of many provinces may play but one role, that of the single-minded, single-hearted father of his people. If he fail, as Nero has failed in this his first duty, it is expedient that he should die.”

“Then, in your opinion ’twere better,” said Seneca, “that an ignorant fool should reign in the place of Cæsar so long as he has dignity and wears the mask of sovereignty as well as the crown.”

“’Twere better.”

“A sorry confession,” answered the old man sighing, and then continued, “I know well the evil of Nero’s life. But he has shown mercy and kept the peace in his reign.”

“His reign is near its end,” said Piso. “I shall slay him, as I have told thee, when he comes to stay at my villa at Baia.”

“He purposes to play the mountebank in Egypt and in Greece,” Natalis added craftily.

“There are many of good birth in the conspiracy,” continued Piso, “more than twenty senators and more than forty of Nero’s friends. They would name Seneca as Cæsar if such be his will. For he is the wisest man in all the world.”

“He has failed,” answered the sage. “He was the tutor to the boy, Nero; and behold the man. Nay more, he has failed because he has not changed men’s hearts. Monstrous cruelties are practised. The greater number of men lust after gold,

women and filthy pleasures. Society decays. There is no trust or faith anywhere."

"The new Cæsar will have power to cleanse the gutters of Rome. By rule and example he should bring back virtue and integrity and create again the old noble race of the Romans."

Not answering this man Seneca went into another room and told his wife Paullina of all these things, and she said, "I would not have thee accept the throne of Cæsar, for thou art not able to change human nature and cast out the base passions of the Romans through wise laws and severe punishments."

Then Seneca determined that he would accept the offer of Natalis and Piso. Contrariwise he went against his wife's counsel and said, "It is my belief that I can advance the good, defeat the evil, and perhaps save the world through wise laws if I am spared to reign as Cæsar for even a few years."

Thereupon he went into the other room and accepted the throne on the one condition that Piso should first be offered as Emperor to the Romans; but if they rejected him then Seneca would accept the crown. Also he bade them remember the laws of hospitality. It was against all right thinking that a host should slay his guest. He would not suffer Nero to perish meanly in the villa at Baïæ. "Let the Emperor be openly dispatched, nobly dying even as Julius Cæsar died in Rome—an offering or sacrifice to the right principles on which the Empire was founded."

The conspirators agreed to this. So Nero lived and laughed in the sun when he stayed at Piso's villa. But when he returned to Rome Milichus came and told him of the conspiracy against his life. Swift action was taken and a number of high-born Romans were arrested. Some were executed, others died by their own hand. But even in this time when Nero had been menaced by a cruel death, he showed mercy to certain of these conspirators. For some were banished, and certain of his friends, whose names had not been published, were permitted to go free, and in another year they displayed their gratitude to Cæsar by plotting against him once more.

When the conspiracy was discovered Seneca determined to take his own life; and Paullina had declared that she would die in the same hour as her husband. "Be it so; thou wilt share in the renown of my end—an end as great as that of Socrates," was his vainglorious answer.

Later, when the old Stoic had said farewell, a vein was cut in his wife's wrists and friends led her into another room. Then

a messenger was dispatched to Cæsar to tell him that Seneca and Paullina were at the point of death. With that touch of nobility that was in Nero, he bade the messenger travel back like the wind, and do his best to save the life of his mistress.

On his arrival Seneca was moribund, but Paullina still lived. Swift measures were taken, a physician bound up her hurts and she recovered. But ever after her face was as grey as ashes because of the great loss of blood.

Seneca faced death with a serenity that was the admiration of those about him who witnessed his end. He died declaring his belief, but to his wife alone, that if he had lived to reign he might have brought salvation to men through the wisdom of his laws, the example of a virtuous life.

He reckoned not with the little man of Tarsus who would presently perish, also believing that he brought salvation to the world through the knowledge of the crucifixion of the Son of God.

But when Paullina gazed upon her dead husband she again said, "Human nature cannot be changed. Base passions may not be uprooted and cast out in this generation or in any generation."

Paullina was a Cynic as well as a Stoic.¹

During that autumn, winter and spring Poppæa reigned supreme, not even Tigellinus daring to question her authority. So she became careless, and neglecting Joah's counsel she let Nero make her conceive once more.

When the mage learned from her that a child lived in her womb he showed no anger; he only said:

"From this time forward our paths separate. Thou hast disobeyed me and surrendered to the destiny written for thee in the stars. Some few of a great and invincible spirit can overcome fate. Thou hast yielded to it. Fare-thee-well, daughter; for alas, I perceive that the kingdom of this world, because of

¹ "To understand the story of those days it is necessary to perceive side by side the death of Seneca, the saint of the pagans, and the death of Paul, the saint and leader of the Christians. One believed that through winning world dominion over the bodies of men he would bring them salvation; the other believed that through capturing world dominion over the spirits of men he would dower them with salvation; and Paullina held not with either of them, regarding the nature of man as unchanging and immutable."

thy weakness, is not for me, and a dark road and another world is for thee."

With these words he left her, and she did not seek him out again. For now she was sure of herself and so puffed up with pride she believed that she could, through the power of the coming child, control the will of Nero and thus reign as Cæsar.

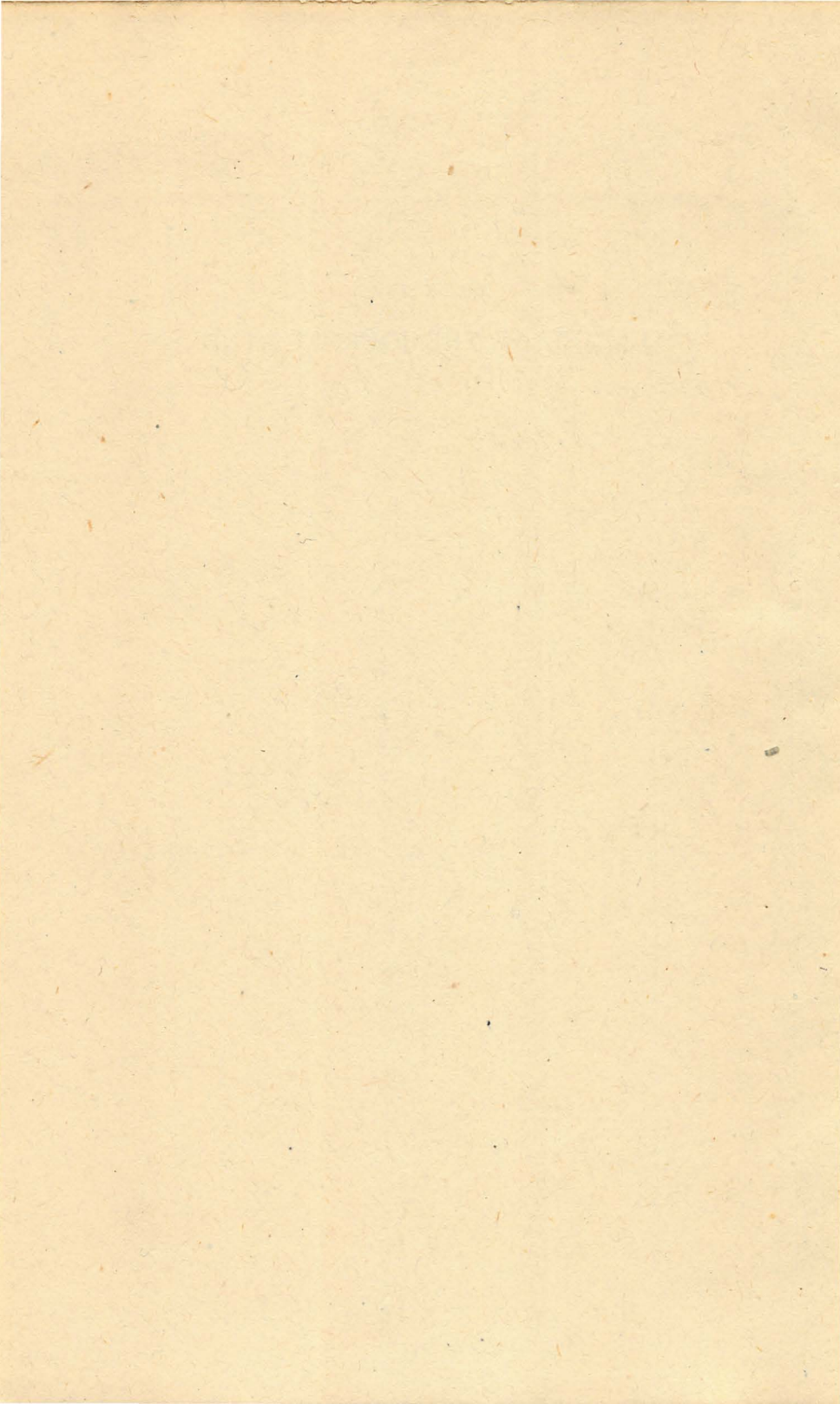
But without the wisdom of the mage she was no match for Tigellinus. When Nero began to weary of his work as an architect he looked for pleasure, and again his favourite tempted him with feasting, wine and licence; and more and more he came to desert Poppæa, who, now that she was great with child, could no longer hold him through her beauty.

One evening when he returned to her after a long absence, she reproached him, raging against him for the filthy pleasures he enjoyed with Tigellinus. The sayings of this favourite were still in his ears, the crafty advice that he should not permit himself to be governed by any woman, for it displayed a weakness in Cæsar that would be mocked at by the court. So, enraged because of wounded vanity and being beside himself, he struck his wife again and yet again. And she with a great cry fell swooning to the ground.

Then Cæsar was filled with remorse and grief. But his sorrow could not in any way relieve Poppæa, whose bodily agony could not be alleviated. In terror and despair she faced the dark ways of death, dying violently and horribly in the presence of the man who was her husband and her murderer.

BOOK IV

ST. PAUL AT THE JOURNEY'S END



CHAPTER XLVI

PAUL had three years to live after his encounter with Cæsar and his departure from Rome. For a time he lived in Ephesus where Timothy was overseer of the Church. Afterwards he visited the churches of Tralles, Thyatira, Magnesia, Colossæ, Smyrna, Philadelphia and Pergamos. From Pergamos he travelled to Troas and took ship for Thessalonica. For a season he lived in Philippi and witnessed the passing of Lydia justly named the Mother of Peace. Later, at the summons of Titus he visited Crete, and then journeyed to Nicopolis where he determined to winter.

While the saint was in that city grave tidings were borne to him of dissension in the churches of Asia. There were two sects within the fold, the Libertines and the Jews who were ascetics and in the tradition of the Essenes. These ascetics held not with marriage, with drinking wine, or even the eating of meat. Many of the Libertines were lovers of the things of this world, and also they spoke heresies concerning the Master. So these two kinds of men, the world-forsakers and those who would live in the world, were at variance. The Libertines were powerful in the smaller churches and a matter of grave perplexity to Paul because numbers of them lived after the flesh, offending against right principle and the inmost truths he taught.

But his mind cast from it the ravelled skein of care when Titus, Luke and Tychicus came across the sea from Crete. Though they, too, spoke of troubles and difficulties and the gross lives of the Cretans yet they cheered Paul by their clearness of vision and their steadfast loyalty. So Titus returned to Crete, and in a little while he sailed for Ephesus taking with him Luke and Tychicus, also Crescens and Trophimus. They abode in the house of Aquila in that city; and all the heads of the churches were summoned for the purpose of determining the future of the faith of Asia.

Now Paul believed that he could through argument, and, if that failed, through command, win back these men of Asia, and thus once more weld the Church into one whole. And it was true that at first they hearkened in silence to him. But no sooner

had he ceased speaking than Hymenæus and Philetus¹ rose up and contended with one another concerning the two ways of living—the way of the Essene and the way of the Libertine. They were men of eloquence, and their words divided the churches, setting the one against the other. Day after day then these brethren warred upon one another, and each would add or take away something from the sound doctrine laid down by Paul. It seemed indeed that no progress was made, for the saint would not yield to any of them, claiming that, as father and founder of the Church in Asia, as one who had seen Christ, it was for him to direct the life, conduct and beliefs of the congregations.

Wherefore, Hermogenes and Phygellus² liking not such discipline demanded of the assembly that they should agree that each church should follow its own road and determine its practices and beliefs.

Now Paul perceived that if these men accomplished their purpose there would be many sects at variance in Asia, that through such lack of unity they would in time perish and fall away. All manner of false doctrine would creep into the Church, idolatry even, if at Tralle, Pergamos, Colossæ, Philadelphia, Smyrna, Ephesus and other places each overseer were permitted to add his own ignorant beliefs to the simple truths which had been embodied in a parchment which set forth the Gospel of Everlasting Life, and in counsel with Peter at Rome he removed all save the simplest sayings. For these two saints aimed at a clear gospel that might be understood by all men and that would command purity of life, chastity and sober conduct. But it was not enough for these men of Asia who were, some of them, still heathen at heart.

So in the end Phygellus, Hermogenes, Philetus and Hymenæus became of accord in the one purpose and worked for it secretly. Only on the last day when the members of the assembly came together was it known. Then all save Philemon and another elder renounced their allegiance to Paul. They would not have him any longer as father and head of the Church in Asia. It was determined that each community should have its own head and be governed by its council of elders who would be answerable to no other authority in this world. And when lots were counted it was found that Paul was rejected; these little men had for the time won their way.

But the Philippian brethren withdrew in protest from the meeting place. They declared their loyalty to the saint, and before

¹ II Timothy ii. 17.

² II Timothy i. 15.

they departed for Thessalonica entreated him to come and live amongst them and be their head in all things.

It seemed, indeed, that after this rejection it were better for the saint to depart from Asia, and he was heavy of heart when he considered the many years of labour he had devoted to these churches. But Mark, Philemon, Aquila and John, known later as the Elder, promised they would, after his departure, labour to bring about unity. And they assured the grieving saint that in time he would be accepted as father of the Church in Asia once again.

In the early summer a small company journeyed to Troas. Trophimus fell sick of a fever and stayed at Miletus.¹ Luke, Erastus and Tychicus were the disciples who went with Paul on this occasion and stayed at the House of Carpus,² a man of repute in Troas.

There the saint worked daily with a scribe, shaping the Gospel that should be the guide of the Church for all future time.

But one day he said to Luke, "My heart misgives me. I fear lest with these divisions all the labour of my life will go for naught and the fables told concerning Christ will corrupt—eating as a canker into truth so that at last no truth remains."

Howbeit, on another day prayer and quiet and a return of the Holy Spirit redeemed Paul from these many fears, and once more he became peaceful and serene in mind and soul.

So when he sailed for Thessalonica he was confident, believing that there was work still for him to do and that he had not failed.

¹ II Timothy iv. 20.

² II Timothy iv. 13.

CHAPTER XLVII

IT was when Paul knelt by Lydia's grave that Demas came to him with a letter from Linus. As in life Lydia had given new courage and hope to the saint in the times of weariness and defeat, so it was fitting that these should be renewed and his spirit refreshed as he stood near where she lay in her last sleep.

The letter also contained greetings from Pudens, Eubulus and Claudia and told of their longing to see the face of their master. Linus wrote of the affairs of the Church, first saying that now they looked on Paul as being in the place of Peter as father of all the brethren. Despite the menace of the authorities the members of the Roman community had multiplied; but now the converts were made only among the poor and the slaves who gloried in the hope of everlasting life. These greatly desired to sit at the feet of their revered master and hearken to the words of the man who had seen Christ.

He told of how Andronicus¹ had lately come from Spain. He had travelled through Gaul and was eager that Paul should visit this country. For it was a land stretching northwards, great in size, in which lived a simple people who might be easily won for Christ if the father of the Church went among those that had understanding of Latin and dwelled in the southern region near the sea.

The Church prospered in Spain. In coming to Rome Andronicus would seek the counsel of Paul in many matters that related to the brethren there. Only the saint could tell him how he might combat the ignorance of this people in their worship of the Moon-goddess and many other gods. Although they accepted Christ, it was only as one of the many other gods whom they also worshipped. Nor would they abandon these as Andronicus bade them and acknowledge only the God of the Christians.

Verily this letter contained much of import, affairs that stirred and quickened the mind of the saint. And Luke perceived that he was as joyful as a young man in the springtime of life, eager

¹ Romans xvi. 7.

for departure, eager to be working among these brethren who called him Father.

When the little company of the saints embarked in a ship that sailed for Corinth they were light of heart. For Paul shed the old radiance of his spirit upon them and in that time gave no more thought to what had seemed the failure in Asia, the failure of many years of labour, of his greatest work.

Erastus¹ took leave of the travellers at the port of Corinth. For it was determined that he should abide in that city and hold its church for Paul and Christ.

Once more the ship faced the open sea, and it was kind. Day after day a little breeze fluttered the sails and birds circled about them in that golden calm. Euroclydon slept, and Paul told Demas, the youthful disciple, of that first voyage to Rome when Euroclydon raged and for many days their ship was tossed by tempest and at last delivered up on the sands of Melita as by the hand of God.

"Then it would seem," said Demas, "that this prosperous voyage of ours is a promise, master, of the prosperity of your future days in Rome."

But even as these words were uttered a white bird that drifted above their heads fell down upon the deck at the feet of Paul. He took it up in his hands and perceived that it was dead.

The shipmaster cried out, "This is an evil portent, inasmuch as we sailors know that whenever a bird perishes thus on a voyage it means a great trouble and peradventure death to the man to whom it comes. Yea, verily, this is a warning from the gods that may not be denied."

"And what is there ill in death?" Paul softly inquired. "To me death is life. Look at my worn body and my white hairs. What are these to me that I should cherish them? Know that beyond the grave there is no more weariness, no more pain; there is a joy incredible in being with Christ. To be with Him is far better than aught that this life can offer me."

The shipmaster hearkened for a while and was so moved in spirit that he besought this man—the only one he had encountered who was not afraid of death—to make him also a sharer in that glory of which he had such good tidings.

After this conversation the saint communed daily with him and certain of his crew. It was not hard for them to believe, and they were baptized while yet the ship was a good way from port. The captain declared that never before had the sea been so kind,

¹ II Timothy iv. 20.

the winds so favourable in his voyages. He believed that their course had been blest by this stranger's god. And even near the coasts of Italy a fair wind blew, and there was peace on the waters, peace in the skies and a peace ineffable about Paul and his disciples.

On that last night before they came to Puteoli the wind dropped for two hours, the ship stayed still and was like a dark bird at rest on the silver waters.

And in that calm an angel of the Lord appeared to Paul and said, "Be of good cheer. Fear not, for in all that comes to pass in these last days thou wilt be upheld, and out of torment and suffering thou shalt speedily be delivered and win the high prize of thy calling."

Slowly the angel faded into the rising mist. Paul was alone with the night, and before that night passed away he had seen God.

It was in a deep tranquillity of spirit that the saint journeyed two days later from Puteoli towards Rome. Pudens, Eubulus and Linus encountered the little company near the Three Taverns.¹ The same joy was shown by these brethren as had been shown by others—who had gone home—to Paul of Tarsus in this place at an earlier time.

After they had rested and exchanged tidings concerning the family of Christ in Rome and in Greece they set out for the city of the Cæsars, hastening forward, for Paul knew in his heart that his days were numbered, and that there was little time for the work that awaited him there.

This was of many kinds and demanded much consideration. For several days Paul gave audience to the elders in the house of Linus. He attended then to the affairs of the world-community of the Galilæans, a name by which the brethren were known at that time in Rome. Andronicus gladly received the counsel and commands of the saint. He was to return to Spain and was given charge of the Church in that rich and peaceful land. At the bidding of the Apostle, Crescens set out for Gaul. Aristarchus and other chosen comrades went with him. Aristarchus had determined to travel the length of that country. He would not rest until he had crossed the sea to Britannia, a country scornfully called "The Island of Barbarians" by the proud

¹ Acts xxviii. 15

patricians. But Aristarchus was fearless, saying that he would liefer preach to the barbarians than to corrupt Romans. The Britons could only torture his flesh, the Romans would torment his spirit with trickery of words and derisive mockery. So, ever bold and venturesome, he departed for a rude and savage land, knowing that there was only hardship before him and that he would not return.

Paul gave much thought to a letter, which, in due course, was sent by Tychicus to Ephesus.¹ Then when all the affairs of the Church had been determined he addressed the whole assembly of the brethren. They were for the most part strangers, for many of those known to him had perished in the persecution.

That was a memorable gathering. The poor and the slaves were greatly moved by the eloquence of the Apostle. Some shed tears of joy, others lifted up countenances that showed a gladness deep and sure that would be with them in the following days. No man who was present ever forgot that hour. Paul was in turn master and father to these hungry people. They were derided by their fellow men for their sober and chaste lives and because they were Galilæans. Always near them was the menace of fresh persecution, yet they doubted not and were upheld and confirmed for all time in their faith through the witness of this bent, aged Apostle.

Afterwards he blessed each one of them in turn ; and night had fallen when the last of them, a veiled woman in dark robes knelt before him. It was Pomponia known as Lucinia. Suspected by her Roman kin she had to go warily when in association with the Galilæans, and this was the first time she had come to the general assembly of the brethren. After receiving the blessing she thanked Paul for sending a messenger to her own country, Britannia. Then he drew her apart, bidding her keep secret the mission of Aristarchus ; for it was not long ago the Britons had rebelled against Roman authority. So, if it were known that a Galilæan had set out to work in Britannia he might be taken up on the charge that he was going there to advocate treason and rebellion against Cæsar. Lucinia promised that she would tell no man, and then softly withdrew from the Apostle's presence.

Now as a consequence of the evening's gathering, the news was noised abroad that Paul of Tarsus had come again to Rome. His old enemy, Alexander the coppersmith, lived in the Porta Capena. There he traded and sought to increase his prosperity by

¹ II Timothy iv. 12.

seeking favour with authority. He petitioned for an audience with Helios, the freedman.

This audience was refused, so Alexander laid his charge before a centurion, and in due course it was passed on to Helios.

Now Lucinia had one highly placed friend who sent word to her of the danger that menaced Paul. So again risking her own security, at daybreak she came in person to the dwelling of Linus. For she would not trust another with these tidings.

When in the presence of the saint she said, "Master, this Alexander seeks thy life because of his old hatred of thee and because he would be rewarded by authority. There have been in the past years many plots against the life of Cæsar. It will, therefore, be easy for this man to bring home his charge against a Galilæan. So I entreat thee to go from Rome within an hour. Journey northwards and join Crescens in Gaul. I will have a carriage waiting for thee beyond the gates of the town. Give no thought to thy needs on the journey, all these will be furnished by me."

"Nay," said Paul, "I cannot desert the brethren."

"But thou wilt be charged and condemned, and the sentence is death by the sword or by crucifixion."

"I am prepared to die."

"But thy trial may lead to a new persecution of all who are known as Galilæans."

Paul pondered, and after a little while he cast a sorrowful glance at this woman from Britannia, and he said:

"But I would have thee know that the Angel of the Lord appeared to me on my journey and commanded me to testify openly to the truth in Rome. Even if persecution of the brethren comes from this testimony we must welcome it knowing that such is the will of God."

Lucinia perceived that she had failed and that no pleading would change the course chosen by the saint. So she asked for his blessing, and then took her leave of him.

Linus soon learned of the danger that menaced the father of the Church. So he hastily summoned those few Roman citizens of good standing and some influence who belonged to the community of the saints.

They went to Paul. And having spoken with him concerning the certainty that he would be brought before the magistrate, they one and all excused themselves, saying that because of their wives and children they could not come forward and testify to his reputation for integrity and obedience to the State. Then,

not even bidding him farewell, they went quickly from his presence. Only at the door of the house they stayed a while to advise Linus to beware of Paul.

Bearing their warning in mind, Linus, the Overseer of the Roman Church, spoke to the saint of the necessities of his charge and of the safety of the brethren.

"Master," he said, "night and day we shall offer prayers for thy acquittal if thou art cast into prison and called to stand trial before Cæsar. But it would only bring persecution on all the brethren if we named thee as one of us and admitted that thou art the head of us all. Wherefore, in the coming time, I may not visit thee in prison, and I shall for all our sakes command the members of the Church to keep to themselves, and if challenged, say that thou art not established in our community. Verily, only in this way may we escape from the destruction of the Church through another persecution."

And Paul bravely answered, "I am prepared to stand alone, but I demand that any man, who is without fear, shall be free to seek me out in prison if it is his desire."

To this Linus consented. Then, at the bidding of the saint, he summoned Demas, the Thessalonian, and acquainted him with the danger that now menaced his master. Paul had two sons in the spirit, namely Timothy and Demas. Timothy came first with him in all things. But in his absence he cherished Demas and depended upon him for those small daily services that were, because of his infirmities, the aged Apostle's need.

Demas was tall and slender as a reed and known as the "golden-headed youth"; and he was lovely as Absalom in the sight of the people.

In this bitter hour Paul turned to him with eager greetings, counting on his loyalty, sure in his faith of this young man's integrity.

Now the seer of Tarsus, like many seers, was at times so absorbed he did not notice outward signs. And, when at the appearance of Demas he took both his hands in his, he did not observe his white face or that he could scarcely control the trembling of his limbs.

"Son, I can count on thee to come to me when I am in prison," said the saint confidently; "thou wilt bring parchment and thou wilt ease the hours of confinement by acting as is our custom as my scribe. Also thou mayest ease my stiffened fingers and the pains in my bones with that ointment which has made them supple heretofore through the stroking of thy hands. I shall

eagerly watch for thy coming, beloved son ; and I shall not weary in the long hours when I am alone and bound in chains because of the certain comfort of thy presence in the times my guard suffer thee to be with me."

At these words the golden-headed youth covered his face with his hands and wept and muttered, "I am afraid."

"God has not given us the spirit of fear," said Paul, much astonished, "but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

"I must be gone to Thessalonica," cried Demas ; "I cannot face the torment of wild beasts or of being nailed upon a tree."

And with that, wailing and crying, the young man fled from the presence of the Apostle, from the house of Linus, and on the next day was gone from Rome.¹

So Paul was forsaken by the brethren and by his beloved son, Demas. But though he grieved at that sudden parting he was courteous and dignified, without question surrendering himself to the guard when at noon they came to the deserted house. After reading the warrant they compelled him to go with them to prison and to bid farewell to those last summer days.

¹ II Timothy iv. 10.

CHAPTER XLVIII

PAUL was led before Helios, the freedman. He stood alone in that court. No friend or Galilæan was among the people present. The command given by Linus had been obeyed.¹

In the lower part of the court stood Alexander, dark and fierce like a wolf. Beside him was another old enemy, Menehas known as the fox of Corinth; for in his frequent attacks on Paul he had always been crafty, choosing the time and his argument with the skill of an old lawyer.

Alexander made two charges. The first that Paul was one of the incendiaries who had fired Rome, the second that as the leader of the Galilæan sect he conspired against Cæsar and was a menace to the State, imperilling authority.

Menehas came forward as a witness, saying, "I first encountered Paul and learnt of his conflict with authority at Corinth. In that city he was brought before Gallio's judgment seat because he sought to persuade men to worship God contrary to the law. Again in Ephesus he was a cause of tumult and uproar, for he menaced the Temple of Diana with destruction. I could name other smaller cities where there has been riot and tumult because of this seditious fellow. But it is enough for me to speak of the time when he was in Jerusalem."² Here Menehas halted and read from a scroll the happenings of those days, the demand of the people that Paul should die and the charges made against him by the High Priest.

When Menehas ceased Alexander spoke of Paul's trial before the Prefect in the Imperial Court, of the misfortune of his acquittal, some years previous to the Great Fire. "He remained then in Rome for a long while," said the coppersmith, "working secretly, speaking for the most part to slaves and vagabonds, gathering them together in the name of and under the banner of a rebel and malefactor called Jesus who was crucified at Jerusalem in the time Pontius Pilate was governor of that city."

Here moved by his wrath and hatred Alexander cried out, "Paul was the first to cast the flaming brand into the wooden

¹ II Timothy iv. 16.

² Acts xxi. 27-40.

huts near the Circus, and so he is undoubtedly the author of the greatest fire the world has ever known."

At this saying there was an outcry from the people in the court. But Paul raised his hand and fastened his eyes upon them. There was power in those eyes, and slowly these stilled the clamour, soon only one or two murmured "He is a wizard, he can mayhap strike a man dead with the beam of his eye."

Then Helios made a sign, and Paul lifted up his voice saying, "Now that licence is granted me to speak I would have thee know that I am a Roman citizen and have honoured my citizenship by speaking only of what is true and by not bearing false witness. This is of no small account when a judge examines testimony. Alexander has lied in his first charge. Here is a letter written to me by the Chief of Asia speaking of my sojourn in Ephesus when Rome was burned. There are many Ephesians who can bear witness to my having lived in that city in the year of this grievous calamity. Nay more, I departed from Italy in the year before the fire, and there are scores of people who have seen me and heard me speak in towns in Asia in that time and since the fire until this summer when I journeyed again to Rome.

"Now, as thou wilt see from this letter that Alexander has committed perjury, thou wilt assuredly recognize that a man who lies on one count will lie upon another count. The second charge is also false inasmuch as I have never conspired against Cæsar. Nay, as a loyal citizen of the Empire, I have even exhorted men to be obedient to the Emperor and the State. In all things I have urged sobriety and peaceful living upon these men who are known as Galilæans. Alexander seeks to have me cast into prison because I have advocated what he calls heresy and have preached the resurrection of the dead."

Here, through weakness, Paul halted in his speech. But in a little while the Spirit so refreshed him he spoke boldly and eloquently of Christ. The strangeness of his words to a Roman like Helios compelled silence, but not for long; inasmuch as this judge declared that it was not on matters of religion that the prisoner was charged.

Then Paul cried out, "Sir, if I am to make an end suffer me to say that I have lived in all good conscience until this day. My hand has not offended against the State, the people or their possessions. I am guiltless of the blood of any men. But I am ready to die for the Name of the Lord Jesus."

Like a trumpet-sound was that voice, and all, even the crabbed lawyers, were moved by it.

For a brief while there was silence. Then at last the people sighed as if they had been under a spell. And even for Helios only slowly there came release from the power of those last words, from the curious nobility of this bowed ancient, from the radiance that so changed his face as he spoke of Jesus.

But the habit of the Law returned, and speaking out of custom and observance the judge said, "Paul, thou art acquitted on the first charge. I accept the testimony of this letter written by the scribe of the Chief of Asia. I admit the question of doubt in what concerns the sayings of a witness who has been found guilty of perjury." Here the judge cast a baleful glance at Alexander who cowered like a beaten dog. "But when speaking of thy God, Jesus, thou hast confessed that thou art one of these Galilæans. Wherefore, I am compelled by reason of the past crimes of this society of treasonable people to give order for thy committal to prison. There thou shalt await the summons of the Imperial Court to appear before Cæsar's judgment seat.

"There are indeed," continued the judge, addressing the advocate, "many matters concerning the prisoner and the society of Galilæans which must be inquired into before this man's trial."

Then the case was dismissed to give room for another; and Paul was led back to the prison near the Forum where he lived in a small dungeon and was rigorously confined.

CHAPTER XLIX

THE Galilæans assembled together secretly for worship at appointed hours in the country outside Rome. Fearing the emissaries of the law, they kept themselves to themselves, for all were afraid.

Linus had lodged with Pudens; and the guard came searching for him. But he had hidden himself away in those caves beneath the earth beyond Rome. In that hive of the dead he was safe from the guard for a while. Then spies went to and fro making private inquiry into the lives and doings of the Galilæans. Everywhere licentious people spoke against them, for they hated the virtue, sobriety and earnest manners of the brethren. Many slanders were uttered, and there was only truth in the accusation that the Galilæans frequently declared that the end of the world was at hand, and that their great Lord would come riding in the clouds on the Last Day. To lawyers these words were the pith of what might be their argument against the prisoner. For it seemed to show that these followers of Paul were a sect that desired and looked for the downfall of the Roman Empire.

But these lawyers were like caterpillars, moving carefully, slowly over the ground. They determined that no others of the Galilæans should be taken up until the trial of their leader declared whether as a body they offended against the common-weal.

Meanwhile a watch was kept on those men known to be Galilæans. Each day a spy followed Luke when he went to the prison. Only on certain days was the physician admitted to the presence of Paul. But his visits were no great consolation to the saint in that season, for he had lost the fiery vigour of the middle years of life and now was old and tired. Deep was his devotion to the Master of Tarsus. They had been daily companions for many years, yet between them there was no comfortable comradeship, no understanding communion in these last days. Paul was no longer of the same temper and heart as Luke. The frailty of his body rendered him too quick and eager for the slow speech and cautious counsel of the Greek who could

record lovely sayings, but because of a certain heaviness of mind failed to utter them. He also failed through his very devotion to the saint which made him a little fearful, and therefore it was as if his tongue were in bonds when he would speak comforting words. So to the last much was left unsaid by him, and Paul did not know of the greatness of his love and reverence.

At the Apostle's bidding Luke employed the time when he was not working for his bread in writing a chronicle of the journeys of Paul. For this might be of good service in the coming trial. So when the two were together their discussion concerned this matter and affairs alone.

In the daytime at the end of summer no friend visited the prison. Luke might only come at sunset when freed from his work.

Now in these last years Paul had been accustomed to a life passed in the company of all kinds of men, and custom had become habit. Wherefore he was vexed in spirit during those long hours of the day; and he was lonely and chafed in soul because he might no longer teach and preach, because he lived in a cell almost as narrow as the grave, and in which there was little change of light. He could bravely bear the hardships of this life and his own infirmities; but it was the knowledge of these fleeting, wasted hours, of the Church failing in Asia, failing everywhere as it seemed, that so provoked the old man. In that loneliness he feared lest all his labour had been of no account and that the Church would shortly break up and perish from off the face of the earth.

This was the darkest time in Paul's life. But with the cooling autumn days there came to Rome one who had kinship of spirit with the Saint.

Onesiphorus¹ presented himself at the prison. And because he was a man of birth and account he was immediately permitted to see the prisoner in his dungeon. These two embraced and Paul wept for joy. Here, in this Gentile, was a man after his heart, one who was kindly, affectionate, and could speak words of hope and eloquence. Again and again he came and he was a refreshment to Paul's spirit, banishing fear and vexation and causing the days to flower through their intercourse. So ill health, pain, hardship and weariness were forgotten by the aged saint.

Howsoever, it was needful that Onesiphorus should go on a mission to Puteoli, and when he came no more the hours dragged

¹ II Timothy i. 16, 17.

heavily, each one stretching as a year of time before Paul. The cold deepened, the waters entered into the dungeon; there were mornings when he could hardly move hand or foot; and of all this Luke wrote to Onesiphorus. But he might not return because of sickness.

So Luke brought parchment to the prison and asked Paul to dictate a letter to him that might summon Timothy to Rome. The saint refused, saying, "The Church is best served if Timothy remains at Ephesus."

No more was said that day. Luke was sorely troubled when he went from the prison, for he always failed to offer consolation, and he knew that Timothy was the Apostle's need. But on the next day at sunrise there came to him the illumination of the Holy Spirit; and at sunset after his work, he returned to the prison and said to Paul, "Linus is faint-hearted and fearful. Only on rare occasions does he summon the brethren together to worship secretly in the fields. So the Church is breaking up through the spirit of fear which is in Linus, and the brethren are falling away. If this faint-heartedness continues, in a little while there will be no Church, and Christ and the faith will perish away in Rome. Wherefore, summon Mark from Ephesus, for he is the one man who can persuade Linus boldly to face the danger of these days and openly minister to the brethren; inasmuch as Mark, the friend of our beloved Simon Peter, can speak eloquently of him, and thus give courage to the Overseer of the Roman Church, healing him of this distemper of mind."

Paul answered, "I will not summon Mark because he is Timothy's strength, his right hand; Timothy, being gentle of soul, cannot stand alone. They are the Church's need in Asia."

"The need of the Church in Rome is greater still," cried Luke. "Summon Mark and Timothy."

Paul shook his head and would speak no further on the matter. But when Luke took his leave he was not permitted to take parchment or pen with him. So he knew that Paul would write.

Outside there was a brilliant glow at sunrise and within there was a pale light. So Paul took up the pen and slowly and painfully, because of his stiffened fingers, he wrote the first lines of a letter to Timothy.

"Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.

"To Timothy, my beloved son; grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and our Lord Christ Jesus.

"Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears. . . ."

Here the pen fell upon the stones. Paul hid his face and wept. He wrote no more that day, for there was desolation in his soul. Two wills warred within him, the will of the saint who believed that God was best served if Timothy and Mark remained in Asia, the will of the man that held that he must see his son because of the frailty of his human love. Hour by hour, as he afterwards told Timothy, he wrestled with what seemed to him then a temptation—that of the Devil—a temptation to surrender to his own sore need.

But on the next day Paul blotted out certain letters in the epistle and, after the salutation, wrote :

"Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy."

And again he was ashamed and put the parchment from him. And when Luke came that evening he would make no answer to his conversation concerning the brethren at Ephesus.

Now Luke had an eye as keen as that of a wild bird. He perceived half hidden in an old tunic the parchment and those first lines of writing. So he did not speak of Mark or Timothy, fearing to bring rebuke upon him. But he went away rejoicing.

Then day after day Paul toiled at the writing of that letter, speaking not of his own needs, but giving good counsel to Timothy and exhorting him to remain firm in his faith. By reason of that stiffness the fingers could only shape a few sentences each day. Luke might have written the whole of that letter, if dictated by the Apostle, in little more than two hours. But between them there was silence on this matter, and no demand was made for a scribe.

A wind blew from the north over Rome, and while still it was autumn the dungeons were gripped for some days by winter's bitter breath. Trembling with cold Paul refused to accept Luke's cloak, for it was the only one possessed by the physician. But eagerly now he returned to his parchment, telling of the departure of Crescens and Tychicus.¹ Then suddenly, strongly, his fingers fastened on the pen, and nearing the end of the letter he bade Timothy come speedily to Rome and bring Mark with him. Also he added the names of books and parchments he had left at the house of Carpus, and lastly asked for a cloak, lightly discarded in the heat of summer, which now was his great need.²

So when Luke came at sunrise and again entreated Paul to

¹ II Timothy iv. 12.

² II Timothy iv. 13.

accept his cloak the saint proudly told him that in a short while Mark and Timothy would bring him all his needs from Troas, and he would liefer wear his own cloak than any other.

Thus saying he handed Luke the letter written with such pain and toil, and he bade him send it by certain brethren who might shortly be journeying from Rome to Ephesus.

From that hour hope returned. Paul was once more master of himself, gentle in his speech to Luke, able to pray however great his bodily suffering, and though sometimes downcast, no longer living in that desolation of despair when his soul cried out, "My God, hast thou forsaken me?"

That same evening Luke sought out Linus and showed him Paul's epistle to Timothy. Before it was closed Linus added to it the greetings of all the brethren.¹ Then they gave it into a sure hand, and on the next day its bearer departed for Asia.

¹ II Timothy iv. 21.

CHAPTER L

SINCE Poppæa's death Nero was not happy, and the moment's pleasure had become a stranger to his mind. In these latter years many plots had been directed against his life, and fear was often his companion. Neither poetry nor women could divert his fancy. He was a prey to a darkness of soul, would not attend to the affairs of State or sit on Cæsar's judgment seat.

His sleep was fitful and he would wake at strange hours and storm and rage at his watching slaves, accusing them of having disturbed his rest. They received the punishment of flogging and Tigellinus advised him to sleep alone.

Then for two nights his slumbers were sweet and deep. But on the third night he was roused by the noise of marching feet. They were not far off and in the orderly beat of good verse. Thinking thus Nero opened his eyes to loneliness, and he was afraid.

A thin mist clouded the air; the flickering lights burned blue. Nearer, louder, came the sound of marching feet. And of a sudden where there had been emptiness there were many shapes. The mists swirled about them, then broke and parted. All who had been slain by Cæsar's orders or who had died because of the reproach of his evil life, were revealed in a white ghastliness. Britannicus, Octavia, Agrippina, Poppæa, Seneca, Senecio, grim-faced Stoics, crucified saints thronged that chamber. They stood there like shrouded fates, menacing, watchful, ominous with doom.

Nero cried for help, for his slaves, for Tigellinus, but the words perished on his lips. It was the hour of the dead and not the hour of man. Cæsar strove to rise and flee, but he was as a prisoner bound.

"It is a dream, imagination's terror," was his muttered saying, and he covered his eyes with his hands. But not to see was a state fraught also with unearthly fear.

Nero looked again. They were no night vision, they still stood there. But now in orderly march those forty friends and senators, who had perished in the great conspiracy, passed in procession by his couch murmuring :

"Prepare for death. Prepare for thy long home."

Last of them all came his loved companion, Senecio, who halted and fastened his gaze upon his master. Then words came. Nero whispered:

"Why, trusted friend, didst thou seek to slay me?"

"Because I would prevent thy disgrace, save thee from the shame of a sullied page in the history of the years."

And at this saying Nero sank back afraid.

Then came another and yet another, each pronouncing doom. Only those Galilæans who had lit torches in Cæsar's garden passed him by without making any sign. After them came the young Empress Octavia. She halted, and her words came clearly to his hearing.

"I gave thee scorn for scorn, Cæsar. But I was virtuous and faithful to thee even in my hate. Shortly thou wilt journey to a land where Cæsar is not known, where there is neither poetry nor song. So hatred hath perished, and there remains in my heart for thee only compassion."

Thus saying she passed, and Nero wept. But sharp again was the agony of his fear when his mother, Agrippina, stood fateful and menacing beside him. Evil and foul was her glance as she cried:

"I set my son upon the throne. I plotted against his life and I perished at his command. Evil for evil. He will die as I died—alone, deserted, and will join me in that outer darkness from which there is no return. Death awaits Cæsar within the compass of three years." And this saying was taken up in chorus, "Death awaits Cæsar, our doom is his doom." Almost it became a clamour, rising like a wave, and then falling into silence.

Last of all came Seneca; and it was a crazed Nero who gazed up at this ancient, whispering, "Mercy, my tutor, my father."

Slowly, carefully, in the old tedious manner sounded the speech of the sage in the gathering quiet.

"Still friend and tutor. Cæsar will be saved from this early death if he turns to good will, if he puts from him folly, and, taking up the burden of Empire, serves the State once more. There is yet time; but there is no more time beyond the grave."

Sighing, as was his wont in life, this phantom passed swiftly, softly from that room; and once more Cæsar was alone.

But these last words defeated the madness which had been stealing into and possessing Nero's mind. For a long while he lay

there trembling, stricken, but still a man and no crazed creature of the night.

At dawn he rose and called a slave, bidding him summon Tigellinus with all speed. And when the favourite came he told him that he had been transported to the court of the dead in which he, Cæsar, the law-giver, had been the accused instead of the judge.

"Awful was my terror, and still fear from that graveyard of night pursues me, troubling all my mind. For I know not if there is truth in their judgment, their prophecy of death."

And Tigellinus answered, "Nay, Cæsar, there was no truth in it. They were but the dream of a disordered body and mind. We will drown such dreams in chariot racing, wrestling and other games. Wearied in the body then Cæsar will sleep sound, no visions of the night disturbing his rest."

But Nero was of a different mind from that of his favourite. He summoned his counsellors, and remembering the last words of Seneca's warning, attended with industry to the affairs of State.

CHAPTER LI

WEEKS went by. Winter came, but Timothy did not come. Yet still Paul cherished the little flower of hope, and though now always suffering from his infirmities he was light of heart, his spirit grandly transcending pain. In those days he talked eloquently to Luke of many things. The barrier between them was overcome in that sure and serene communion. But there came an hour when it was raised once more. It happened in this way. Luke spoke to Paul of his two years' imprisonment in Rome before the first trial.

"So there will be a year or more further imprisonment," he said; "and I would gladly be thy scribe and write down all thy sayings. Have I not already with my own hand prepared the yearly chronicle of thy journeys for the lawyers? Now it is expedient that the doctrine and the government of the Church should be determined by thee for all future time, master. For thou art now the head of the whole Church and not only of the west, which was thine own creation."

Paul smiled. "Nay, I am its servant," he said, "and in his life Peter was first, for I was least among the Apostles."

"It is the measure of a man's work and talents," answered the Greek, "that makes him leader and master in the things of the mind and spirit." And then, changing the manner of his speech, he entreated Paul to husband the precious days before him, devoting himself to the task of recording the teaching of Paul, in which should be included all right thinking, right doing, as well as the numbers of elders and overseers, and the government of each community.

"Thou speakest out of the mind of a Greek," said Paul. "I would not build up a church as if it were the government of a state; for I fear to mould it into the shape of any institution that is of the world. Nay, rather I would have it free from all temptation of riches. Shape it like a little Greek polity and assuredly it will grow into a body of men whose ways are governed by gold. I perceive that on such foundations may be raised great and gorgeous temples in the manner of the Temple of Diana at Ephesus, and the work of Christ will be lost within

such gaudy array. The hills, or any mean rooms in the cities, are places wherein God may be sought in all purity of heart. And where there are no riches there will be no diversion for the eye, or peril of covetousness. I speak of what might come to pass. There is no danger of it in the present time. But if I write of a future time I would lay down as the first law of the Church that its elders, teachers, and overseers should be called the servants of poverty and renounce all wealth when they take up such a life for themselves and the Church. If rich gifts are made let them be bestowed on the poor, being distributed with wisdom among those in need.

"Nay, nay," Paul cried, perceiving that Luke took up the pen. "Do not set down what I have said in writing. I would first shape the text in my mind, then consult those parchments which Timothy brings with him from Troas before ever the first word of the Gospel of Christ recorded by his servant Paul is graven upon any page."

"But, master, time passes," Luke entreated.

"It is not my will to commence this work before Timothy's coming," was the Apostle's answer.

He spoke with such sternness Luke dared not say any more to him that evening. But again and again at the hour of sunset, which they shared together, he prayed Paul to suffer him to be his scribe. His request was always refused; and at last the saint commanded the Greek to speak no more to him of this matter for his mind was made up. Only when in the company of Timothy would he be so inspired that he could produce the gospel which would be a living guide for all the generations of men. Then Luke was stricken; and though jealousy might not enter and dwell in his kindly soul he suffered much and in silence because Timothy came first, and he, Luke, the elder and wiser man, might not be the scribe of Paul.

CHAPTER LII

NOW when Nero again came to acquaint himself with the affairs of State, the list of prisoners and cases of suspected treason was laid before him. To one only Helios called his attention, saying, "Cæsar, this prisoner, Paul of Tarsus, is a strange man, and I am in doubt on the matter whereof he is charged. He is named as the chief of the Galilæans—those treasonable persons who set fire to Rome. And if it be true that he is of that conspiracy and likely, therefore, to conspire again against Cæsar, then he should be put to death."

"Surely, surely," answered Nero.

"But when Paul came before me," continued Helios, "I was troubled by the nobility of his manner and the eloquence of his speech. It seemed to me, as I listened to him, that he was the very mirror of truth and integrity, made of the stuff of the ancient patricians who would die in torment rather than betray Rome. I may err on this count; but of such appeared to me to be the temper of this Roman citizen, Paul. Wherefore, it seems that only Cæsar's wisdom can determine the issue and give right judgment in this case." Here Helios sought to flatter Nero, and Nero's vanity was delighted by this tribute. So he said:

"Thou canst take upon thyself the judgment of the other prisoners; but I will have this man Paul brought before me in the court. From this day, Helios, I am determined to work with industry and zeal for my subjects, then they will all love me and call me the father of the people."

"Yea," answered Helios, looking with compassion upon his pleasure-seeking Emperor. For he reckoned that this determination was but a brief fancy that would pass within a few days. But when he went from his master's presence he bade a centurion intimate to the prisoner, Paul, that in three days' time he would stand trial before Cæsar in the Imperial Court. Thus Nero's night-vision led to the Saint of Tarsus appearing before the ruler of the world at the year's end.

Now Onesiphorus was acquainted with Helios and with the centurion. On the eve of this disciple's return to Rome the centurion told him of the trial, and in haste he summoned Luke

and bade him prepare the points of argument that might serve the prisoner. All night, then, Luke shaped and reshaped the count of the great happenings in Paul's life. Then in the morning he did not go to the workshop, but made his way to the prison. Howbeit, it was not until noon that he was suffered to enter Paul's cell. It was a day of sun and brightness, and it was easy to perceive the face of the Apostle, for the customary gloom of that narrow place was shredded through with light.

His countenance was grey from illness and the long confinement. Wherefore, woeful and distraught, Luke cried out, "Master, master, thine hour is at hand, and the work is not accomplished. We have not yet the witnesses; we are unprepared."

"Peace is mine," said Paul, and, raising his hand he traced a cross upon the air, then gravely continued, "I have fought a good fight; I am at the end of my journey; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness. Yea, and for thee also, Luke, and for all who have loved the appearing of Jesus, the Christ."

But these words did not allay Luke's grief for his master. With anguish he remembered that they had still no tidings of Timothy. He cried:

"The Gospel of Jesus as recorded by His servant Paul has not been written. And now all those sayings and doings of thine are lost to the world. Remembrance perishes. In a few years who will know of the glory?"

"Write out thy heart, Luke, and all that God would have known to men will thus be recorded."

"But Timothy has not come," groaned the physician, daring at last to speak of what must mean desolation to one who loved his son so well.

For an instant the face of the old man lost its calm, suffering passing across it—arrow-like, piercing; but swiftly it vanished, and Paul made serene answer:

"The joy of the Holy Spirit is with me . . . and thou also, Luke, ever my faithful companion on the road, thou wilt be with me in the hour of my last trial—good comrade till the end, till we meet at the Cross."

And Luke, the staid elder, whose eyes had ever been dry, wept bitterly. But Paul spoke brave words of comfort. Slowly and with sureness this great man imparted his own peace, the Spirit's peace to the stricken physician.

Then, for a time, they worked together studying the text of

the argument written by Luke. But suddenly Paul dropped the parchment, stood up, and his face was illumined as he cried:

"On that day I shall trust only my God. Making no preparation I shall utter those words the Holy Spirit puts into my mouth. Wherefore, let us not waste what may be the last hour we pass together studying the devices of Alexander and the quibbles of the lawyers."

Then these two communed together of the things of the Spirit, also of the many perils they had shared by sea and land, and of golden hours of peace passed in each other's company. So before the leave-taking they were at one in heart and soul, at one for all eternity.

During the months of Paul's imprisonment Luke owed his liberty and perhaps his life to the sorrowful Lucinia, the woman who came from barbarian Britannia. She had one steadfast friend in Julian, a man of virtue and high integrity, whose character was cast in the mould of the old Romans. At her bidding he conveyed a large bribe to Helios and exacted a promise in return that Luke should not be arrested and should be permitted to visit Paul each evening.

Now on the eve of the trial Julian sent for Luke and said to him, "Our protection ends with the trial. We fear that thou wilt be the first taken up if Paul is condemned. So I would have thee journey to my villa on the sea coast where thou canst be hidden away and live in all surety."

"But if persecution of my brethren follows the trial I may not desert them," answered Luke.

"Thou should go for it is thy master's command. I visited him an hour ago in the prison, and he sent this message to thee. 'Bid Luke set down a faithful record of our journeys; and also, if he is permitted, that knowledge he has of Christ. Tell him that the writing of our acts and of the Gospel is his first task; and I trust him to bear faithful witness.' " Here Julian paused, and then asked, "Wilt thou obey Paul's command? I am not of thy belief, preferring the old gods of Rome. But my villa is at thy disposal for the fulfilment of this task."

Then Luke thanked Julian and accepted his invitation, but refused to leave Rome until the end of Paul's trial.

On the last day, save for Julian's visit, the saint was alone. He passed his time in prayer and in that rapt contemplation

which drew to him, surely and profoundly, that illumination which was his strength.

Towards evening the guards came and led him to the baths. There he cast off his filthy rags and washed and refreshed himself. Then he was given a white tunic and cloak so that he should have a seemly appearance that would not distress Cæsar when he came before him on the morrow. Afterwards, in the darkness of his cell, Paul listened for a while to the murmur that arose from the streets of Rome. Then, having prepared himself for the night, he slept easily and sweetly like a little child.

CHAPTER LIII

WHEN Paul entered the Imperial court he perceived a great assembly—all the leading and privileged people of the city filling that hall, eager to see a man who was said to be different from all other men. These Gentiles came as to a theatre, for diversion, and laughed and talked until Cæsar was announced and took his place upon the judgment seat.

At first to the prisoner the court was a blinding scene. The brilliant robes of the knights, patricians and freedmen, the glittering armour of the Imperial Guard were strange even to Luke, for whom Julian had obtained a place in that chosen assembly.

Now Cæsar smiled and waved to the people, and they applauded him with a clapping of hands. Always in a public place he liked to play the actor's part. Then the proceedings were opened. Witnesses were called, and again Menehas and Alexander spoke of the tumults and riots caused by Paul in every city which he entered in Asia, Syria, and Greece. Others also testified against the character and life of the Galilæans. Then, having paid homage to Nero, the advocate summed up the charges made, saying:

"Paul of Tarsus teaches men everywhere to set themselves against Cæsar and the law. He is the head of a conspiracy which is spreading like a spider's web throughout the Empire. The Galilæan sect of which he is chief and founder renounces family and country. Its members call themselves followers of a crucified rebel named Christ. They do not believe in any gods, not even in the divine majesty of Rome incarnate in the august form of Cæsar. At the time of the great fire their impiety was such they sang songs of joy when the Temple of Hercules and the Temple of the Moon crashed to the earth in flames. They are haters of all mankind and delight in prophecies of the destruction of Empire."

During this speech, with an air of disquiet, Nero had glanced now and then at Paul, and of a sudden he whispered to Tigellinus, "I have seen the prisoner before. That yellow face is not easily forgotten."

His whisper caused the advocate to pause and look towards the judgment seat. Then, remembering their encounter and Paul's wise counsel, Nero said, "It is hard to believe that the prisoner could be a party to such a catalogue of infamies."

And Paul could forbear no longer, crying out, "Most noble Cæsar, I deny them all; they are lies."

After this saying a hush fell upon the court; for these two men, the lord of temporal power and the lord of spiritual power, gazed at each other, and in their eyes were question and answer. And it seemed to Luke, who alone knew what lay between them, that Cæsar's answer was an acknowledgment of his failure in not having heeded Paul's counsel given when they had walked together beside the river Tiber. For Cæsar sorrowfully hung his head.

A murmur passed through the court as, after a little while, he turned to the lawyer with a look of displeasure, saying, "Finish the accusation, but be brief. For I would hear the prisoner's answer, and thou art a tedious fellow."

And now to all present it seemed that Paul would be acquitted; but the lawyer spoke craftily:

"The prisoner is a wizard—the director of a peculiar society of assassins and magicians. They meet in secrecy and practise dread mysteries. Alexander of Ephesus can testify that a newborn babe is at times presented as a symbol to the knife of the proselyte at such gatherings. Then, when the innocent has been slain, these Galilæans tear asunder its members and drink its blood. Later, in darkness, they practise incest and other filthy things too awful to be named. I speak of what I know when I say that these Galilæans, or followers of Christus, are rebellious slaves and practise the old abominable magic by means of which they seek to destroy the Empire."

Then Paul could contain himself no longer and spoke vehemently:

"If it can be shown that such abominations have been practised they are worthy of the severest punishment. We Galilæans have ever preached love and charity, making them our rule of life. We have ever taught obedience to our rulers. Is it possible then, or likely, that we should commit the cruel and infamous acts recounted by this hired lawyer? They are the denial of the doctrine we preach, of the truth to which we testify. Take heed, that he has made these statements but has summoned no witnesses to testify to them, for there are none. He speaks but idle gossip which is always a vain deceit.

Then this man has called Christ, my Master, a malefactor. But Christ was the peerless One, the Son of the one true God. He walked the earth in the guise of man, recommending obedience to Cæsar, bringing good tidings of salvation to a hungry people who wandered in a wilderness of ignorance and doubt. Yea and more; to Cæsar and to men He came, discovering for all the secret truth hidden till now—the truth of everlasting life. I speak in all earnestness when I say that by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ the sting of death has been taken away and life and immortality brought to light through His Gospel.”

Here Paul halted in his speech, his breath and strength failing him. He had broken the law of the court in not suffering Alexander's advocate to finish the accuser's argument. But no one had heeded the lawyer's protesting words. All were caught by the fire of great oratory. So, eagerly fastening his gaze upon the might of the world incarnate in this court, Paul continued, speaking of salvation and of heaven and hell, declaring the Kingdom and the glory of the righteous, their forgiveness through the sacrifice of the blood of Christ. Then, having spoken of the Lighted House of the Father, he told of that outer darkness which was the destiny of the unrepentant, the fornicators, the people of pleasure, adulterers, and slayers of men.

On hearing these words Cæsar rose. The court rose also, the people, still under Paul's spell, dispersing in silence. It was the hour to break fast. Nero withdrew. But he could neither eat nor rest, groaning and muttering, “The dead came to me yester eve and I hoped that they were an evil dream. But now this Jew says that the dead live on.” And being in an agony, Cæsar cried out, “Why has this mage returned to taunt me with the terror of a life beyond the grave, a life in which all those who have died by my orders await me—gibbering shades who, when I go there, will mock at me and tear my soul asunder in torment?”

Perceiving the sweat of fear on Nero's brow and not knowing of his earlier encounter with Paul, a Stoic made swift answer, “Thou art one of the good and the great, Cæsar. In the after-life the good and the great rule the stars, and, framed in their golden orbs, enjoy the eternal felicity of watching the movements in the firmament.”

Here Tigellinus laughed and took hold of Cæsar's arm saying, “There is nothing to be afraid of save the body's ills in the whole wide world. No one believes in heaven and hell nowa-

days or pays homage to Jupiter. The gods are old, lazy, and gouty. The dead sleep for ever."

Nero lifted heavy eyes to his favourite, muttering, "I am plagued by this fellow who, coming as he does after that visitation of yester eve, gives me grave disquiet lest some evil thing overtake me."

"He is a necromancer, the head and founder of a society of magicians."

"Yea, a necromancer," answered Nero.

"The chief of a conspiracy. Sentence him to death, Cæsar; and then put from thee all the affairs of State. For thine is a sickness of the mind."

"Truly said. Since Poppæa's death it has been so," said Nero, drawing Tigellinus aside and walking apart from his courtiers.

"There is a certain cure for it. Give thyself to poetry and to chariot racing. Prepare for the conquest of Greece. Work at thy lyre and at the singer's craft. Then in the summer we will journey to Athens and Corinth, where thy progress will be a triumph."

Thus speaking Tigellinus beguiled Nero out of his dark mood. He forgot himself for a short while as he planned with his favourite the conquest of Greece, not with arms but with his poetry and song. So fear only returned when a councillor came to him and asked if it was his pleasure to give judgment in the case of Paul of Tarsus.

"I believe that this necromancer," said Cæsar to Tigellinus, "cursed me on that night two years before the fire when I walked with him beside the Tiber. And yet at first he led me to believe that he was a poet and told strange fables I would have turned into verse. But now remembrance of them has gone from me." Here he paused, sighing, and then said, "I would I knew what should be my judgment and whether this Paul is a half-crazed poet or one given to the practice of magic? In truth, Tigellinus, he speaks well and is a fine orator. He commands the attention of the people even as I do when I hold them with my art in the theatre."

But his favourite mocked at this saying, declaring that the artist in Cæsar betrayed the discerning judge. "In admiring this man's eloquence thou hast lost sight of the charges made. He is a conspirator, Cæsar, and he must die."

And on this saying Nero returned to the court and the trial was resumed.

Paul took up the word and, for the last time to a great

audience, told of the appearance of Christ on the road to Damascus. He was the Son of God who in the guise of man had died upon the Cross and again had shown Himself in Light, thus declaring the abolition of death and the promise of immortality. It was not to one only but to as many as five hundred He had appeared in a previous time.

Paul spoke then of his encounter with the Master, of what it had meant to him and of what it might mean to the Gentiles. Some listened eagerly, some murmured that it was the tale of a witless wanderer, others scarcely heeded the words, so held were they by the voice and by the change in this old, bent man. For now his withered face was as the face of an angel. And slowly, surely, in the presence of this illumination there fell a hush upon all the court.

Nero's head was sunk upon his breast, his brow clouded. But suddenly he rose up and asked, as if in jest, though his voice trembled, "O Seer of the Unseen, shall Cæsar reign over the empire of the dead?"

It was a challenge. Paul answered boldly, uttering his own sentence of death.

"There is justice and mercy in the heart of Cæsar. Wherefore he should understand me when I say that Cæsar will not reign over an empire beyond the tomb. For there the first shall be last, the last first."

It was a noble appeal to the young Emperor who in these latter years had been lost in the shadows of his darkening life.

But there came fierce cries of "Shame, shame," from the body of the court. All was noise and confusion as Tigellinus bent forward and whispered in Nero's ear, "This fellow is the head of a band of conspirators. Sentence him quickly to crucifixion and be done with him."

Then Cæsar stood up, made a sign, and the wrathful murmuring of the people faded into a silence that was still and deep.

"It is time to give judgment," he said. "On the first count I find the prisoner guilty. As chief of the Galilæans he is dangerous to authority in our twenty-five provinces. It has been clearly shown by witnesses that he has passed his life in stirring up rebellion and in plotting against the State. Ye all know that the penalty for such treason is death. As a Roman citizen the prisoner may have the privilege of execution. He shall die by the sword."

Here Nero hesitated and faltered in his speech. Paul fastened

his eyes upon him, saying gently, sorrowfully, "I pray that this sin will not be laid to thy charge, Cæsar." And these two eyed each other, and again they were as man to man. But Nero could not bear those eyes for any long time. Muttering, "Magician, sorcerer," he fell back into the judgment seat and covered his face with his cloak.

Never for the Romans had there been such a strange spectacle. Cæsar confounded; greatness, majesty, overturned. But speedily the ushers cleared the court, and Paul was led away by the guard and lodged in the Tullianum, the prison beneath the earth.

Nero remained alone save for his favourite and dark familiar, and he was desolate of heart. For a long time the persuasive words of Tigellinus went past his hearing unheeded. But at last he stirred and sighed, saying, "I have sentenced a man greater than Seneca, for this Paul is a poet. But why did he conspire against me? Why do all those I might have trusted seek my life?"

"The common people love thee, Cæsar," answered Tigellinus. "Put your trust in them." Then speaking honeyed sayings about Nero's skill in words and music the favourite diverted his master, and they withdrew from that court.

An hour after Paul of Tarsus was condemned to death his judge had forgotten him. For Nero was lost in dreams and plans for his triumph over the Greeks.

"As a race of poets and artists," he said to Tigellinus, "they alone have understanding of me, and it is only through understanding there comes love. I shall set out as soon as affairs of State permit and win the heart of this great people."

Thus the prisoner in the Tullianum was forgotten and did not again return to the remembrance of his judge.

CHAPTER LIV

THE dungeon for condemned prisoners in the Tullianum was known as "the sepulchre," for those who rested in it were slowly eaten alive by rats. Some of the condemned, who had a weapon to hand, slew themselves rather than face its horrors.

On the evening of the trial Paul bade farewell to the sunset. A rope was tied round his middle and he was lowered by the guard into the murky depths of this pit. It was like a descent into hell, and it was only slowly the prisoner, after the first blindness of that night, came to know that there were other creatures in that place of the lost.

One man, a Phrygian as Paul learned later, moaned and cried continually; another, a robber, told the saint that he had become mad through fear of the rats that, when the prisoners slept, came out of the dark and, suddenly attacking them, devoured hands, face, and feet.

"One of us keeps watch while the others sleep," said the robber; "and thus we strive to guard ourselves from these filthy vermin. But the Phrygian was alone in this cursed charnel pit for a number of days, and thus his mind perished, for he could not always keep awake, he needs must sleep."

And then a third, a murderer, came and spoke to Paul and told him of his life. How he had drunk wine and lived with harlots, wasting all his substance. There came a day when he, for his debts, was sold as a slave; and he, who had lived softly, must needs take commands from another and suffer the hardships of a bondsman's life.

"In my rage," said this man, "I rose up and slew my master when he had caused me to be flogged for having broken a precious vase. And now I who have loved and laughed in the sun am buried in this night, and shortly my body shall be a portion for the worms. So I have cursed the gods and know only the last bitterness of despair. For me there is no hope, and I pray for a speedy death before I, too, become as the crazy Phrygian and shame what remains to me of manhood."

Now Paul was one who could ever discover the secrets of the sorrowful because of his forgetfulness of himself and his

compassion for others. He was suffering, feeble and weary. Yet an hour after his coming to this dungeon he was succouring the lost, telling these two men of the promise of the Saviour, that even now when on the threshold of death they would be saved.

And the murderer marvelled and confessed his other offences, which were many, and declared that here in this pit where there had only been darkness there now was light. But the robber would have none of it, and made sport of the sayings of Paul. Then his fellow prisoner smote him in anger, and after that these two became like raging gladiators in the arena, beating each other and crying out filthiness. At last the thief was overcome and fell back, lying as if he were dead.

But despite a fever that now caused Paul to quake in his limbs he went to this man and prayed, stroking his brow, his hands and feet; and through the power of the Spirit he brought him back to remembrance. But he suffered from a wound on his head, and all that night the saint remained beside him, persuading and comforting, striving to give him ease from his pain.

The other two prisoners slept fitfully, roused at times by the rats that came upon them suddenly, and even Paul was attacked as he watched, yet he was not troubled or afraid. Then, in the new day that remained night in that place, there came a change, a stilling of fear, a passing from despair for these two men who were whole in mind.

Before another sun had set in the outer world they were reconciled by Paul to each other. And when at his bidding they embraced, the saint, now almost at the borders of death by reason of his weakness, laid himself down and slept soundly till cock-crow came again. So a murderer and a robber, both infamous in their lives, kept watch over him and loved him. From that time he was friend of all but the man who seemed possessed by many devils; for he would for hours cry and lament and throw himself about as if in an agony.

And the robber said to Paul, "Master, thou hast given me hope and comfort; but if this witless creature continues his crying I shall soon be as he is. Can nothing save us from the terrors he rouses up with his clamour?"

Then the saint went to the madman, and though at first he howled at him and even flung him into the filth of that noisome place, at last by reason of the power that never deserted Paul while in the dungeon, he became calmer and fell into a silence. Thus was he slowly freed until the saint gave the command for the seven devils to come out of him; and it was so. He be-

came as a lost youth who crept to Paul's side and prayed to him for comfort like a little child.

The guard gave them bread and water at sunrise and sunset. At other times they were left to themselves. But for all the prisoners save Paul there were hours when the terrors overcame them, and they wept. And Paul's limbs were swollen and painful, and when evening came he believed that his spirit was passing. But after a while his failing strength was renewed, and he rested tranquilly during the last night in that dungeon.

At dawn he was prepared for the summons which he knew would greet him in the morning. So he spoke the sayings of good will and took leave of these prisoners whom he had won for Christ.

There was a fourth man who never spoke in all that time. He was the youngest, and through fear had lost the power of speech. But at the last his tongue was loosed. He begged Paul to utter the word of grace; and in the saying of it the saint for ever removed fear from him. Of these five prisoners this youth Publius was the only one released. For his father had come hastening from the east and had paid a big sum to Helios. Then this corrupt judge discovered that false witness had been borne against the youth. He was not a treasonable person, and so was given his freedom. In a later time he became a man of learning and a Galilæan, and told them of what he had seen in the prison of the Tullianum in those last memorable days.

CHAPTER LV

IT was early morning when Paul was drawn out of the darkness into the light of the upper airs. He had the appearance of an outcast, was clothed in soiled rags; earth and crawling things shaming his worn body, which was now like a skeleton.

The curious passer-by might perceive the deep scars that had been graven upon his uncovered back by the lash in past years. There were wounds upon his face and limbs where the flesh had been torn by the rats of the sepulchre, and his beard was wild and raddled.

Young men came near and called him traitor who would soon be carrion. They put upon him filthy names; jests passed from mouth to mouth. They wagged the finger of scorn. But Paul did not heed them. His body was racked by pain; his mind was above and beyond pain. And later, as he told Timothy, he knew in that time love, compassion, and union with Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, even with those men of malice, his accusers. The peace everlasting comes not so easily, for peace which is union with others descends only from the calm that is above the frenzy of evil, hatred, and self-will. But in that hour Paul by the Holy Spirit was joined in unity of peace with men of good and evil heart; and he forgave these youths, also Nero, Alexander, Menehas, and his several accusers. For he saw behind lust, cruelty, and greed this unity of all men and that evil came through ignorance and the separateness and division of their lives.

And as he stood there looking out upon Rome and reckoned up the tumult of its days, its crowded ways, he remembered what Peter had told him of Christ and the storm upon the lake. He remembered His words and was caught in their deep serenity:

“Peace, be still!”

Now certain of the brethren drew near with Timothy at their head, and they murmured, “Rome is a place of weeping. This is a day of tears.”

And Paul cried out, "Nay, it is a day of joy, of festival, for I shall soon be with the Father."

Then the guards gathered about him and the order to march was given. But, being feeble and weighted by his chain, he stumbled and fell. And after they had raised him up he again stumbled, breathing heavily like some spent swimmer.

The centurion was a kindly man. He beckoned to Timothy and spoke with him. Then Timothy passed between the guards; and these two, the saint and his disciple, embraced one another, but they could not speak. For Paul this last grace bore the sharp pain that comes with the nearness of parting and the radiant ecstasy at the presence of the well-beloved, his staff and comfort on this, the last journey.

The young men made a clamour, jeering and mocking at his grey hairs. But the centurion silenced them, crying shame upon their manhood. Here was a venerable seer, a man of noble estate. So with heads hung down they crept away, disappearing into the streets of the city.

Then the procession of guards and the following brethren moved slowly forward, marching down the Sacred Way, round the Palatine and Aventine and out by the Ostian Gate.

The sun shone, casting its golden light over the marble palaces and white towers. There was a sound of hammering, slaves labouring at the building of the new Rome, and they sang at their work. For it was a day of joy, the sun's rays making gladness in the skies; the glory of the Creator spreading over all the earth.

Slowly, painfully, along the straight road without the gates, the aged Apostle walked, but now in spirit so uplifted he could conquer the infirmities of his dying body and whisper the words of consolation, the words of his trust to Timothy—his own son in the spirit.

It was a marvel. Here were two as David and Absalom, but without the sorrow of these two, without the vain regret and mourning of the king and desolated father. For in spirit Paul and Timothy were not in any hour divided, and now they were for ever one.

But the last piece of the road was hard for the aged Apostle, and Timothy, strong in the prime of his manhood, lifted up the light burden of his body, carrying it to the end of the road.

They came to a hollow between hills, a place of peace and rest, of sun and stillness, on one of the first days of the early year. And the centurion suffered Paul to withdraw a little way

from his guards and pray. Then when the summons came the saint blessed the sorrowing brethren and once more embraced his son, saying, "My faith is in thee, Timothy; my peace, the peace of Christ I leave with thee, well-beloved."

Turning to the centurion, he said, "I am ready, it is finished."

Two guards advanced and led their prisoner to the block. They were speedy and merciful. Swiftly the head was severed from the shoulders of Paul of Tarsus. Above and beyond the dark shrunken body, the freely flowing blood, the kneeling saints perceived a white light, a radiance as of the spirit rising from the clay. They knew that it was the spirit of Paul, and they were contained for a while in his everlasting peace.

CHAPTER LVI

AT the entrance to the place of execution they stood, two dark figures against the sunset's red heart.

And Julian said to Linus, "I have read the acts of Paul as recorded by Luke. This Jew of Tarsus was greater than any Roman. His is a strange race. Its people can be angels or lower than the beasts of the field."

"That may be said of other races," answered Linus. "But Paul has roused up hatred and wrath in many cities. Men hate us Jews for our vision of God, our dedication to God. In the days to come they will suffer and be persecuted because Jesus the Christ is of my race. The hosts of darkness will, through the Gentiles, harry and crucify the Jews for having through Christ offered salvation to all men."

"A prophecy, master," said Julian.

"A truth," answered Linus; "for the vision of God is welcome only to the pure in heart. These will be found in every nation, but they are few when counted in the generations of men."

"Then faith in the God of Paul must die?"

"It will be preserved by those few I have called the pure in heart till the coming of the Saviour. So I have seen it when I was in a trance on the Lord's day."

Then these two became silent. They entered the hollow between the hills. But it was empty; the body had been taken away.

All that day Paul lay in the charnel pit where he had been cast by the soldiers. In that festering cave of death there was no precedence, no rank or authority. The bones of poor Greeks, Africans, Spaniards, barbarians, and the bones of slaves rotted the one above the other; and the last comers might be discovered nearest the mouth. Unwatched, the holy body of Paul of Tarsus lay there as noon passed into evening, as the day died.

That day was as any other uneventful day in the march of the years to the peoples of many races who lived in the Imperial city. They ate, slept, gossiped, bathed, laboured, traded, went to and fro like ants on their heap and searched vainly

for pleasure and for news of some scandal or murder. The rich lamented that nothing ever happened nowadays. Some of the young men mourned because there was peace throughout the entire world. Others made votive offerings to the god of war and prayed for battle that would give them new delight in life or imperishable fame. Because the time was unmarked by any happening the proud and the great fought with their wives and concubines or bullied their slaves.

All Rome yawned.

On that day the keeper of histories sighed, for there was nothing he might put down in his chronicle. The scribe of the palace sighed. It was a dull day, a dog's day. There was no happening to write on the parchment.

He turned over a blank page.

CHAPTER LVII

FROM noon onwards Lucinia walked to and fro in her garden. Since hearing of the execution she had remained dry-eyed, yet Paul was the man she revered above all others. But no slave of the household could prevail on her to rest, to cease from pacing to and fro. Only now and then she would pause and enter the tomb prepared long years ago for herself at the end of her garden. She suffered from a sorrow that time would not cure. When the tribunal of the family had sat in judgment on Pomponia Græcina they had demanded on the strength of her marriage oath that she should swear another oath—namely, that never would she shame her family by making a public declaration of her faith in Christ.

In those hours of fear the young, ignorant matron from Britannia took the oath and promised never openly to be a member of the sect of the Galilæans. Being an honourable woman she had kept it faithfully, and even in the days of persecution after the fire when she was sorely tempted. But always she wore black robes as a sign of the deep grief this oath caused her, as a sign of contrition and mourning.

Now in these hours after the execution she waited impatiently, hoping, fearing, praying that the body of Paul of Tarsus might be discovered and laid to rest in the tomb in which she had passed many nights in other years as a mortification of her once fearful spirit. Now all fear had been burned away, but the oath remained and the grief that, because of it, she could not be recognized as one of the children of the Elect. But, as guardian of the body of Paul, she might find mercy, and at last, the peace that gives healing even to vain remorse.

So she paced to and fro with troubled step, hoping, and then fearing lest by denial of this gift she might lose all, remaining a bond-woman to her oath.

Only as evening came did she speak at last to her maid Eustachia and tell her of all these things.

On that day when Rome yawned Nero was busy preparing for

the announcement of his marriage with Messalina, the widow of Vestinus who had been slain for conspiracy. In other years Messalina had at times offered the Emperor a day and a night of pleasure, and now that he would put care and trouble from him he was persuaded by Tigellinus to ask this woman to be his wife. But on this day knowledge of it was confined to three people. Already happiness was returning to Nero as he planned with his favourite to depart in the summer, seeking his triumph in Greece.

And Tigellinus worked craftily on his master's mind, saying, "Thou mayest go in all safety and dream for a long while among a people who have understanding of thee. The doors of the Temple of Janus are closed. Thanks to Cæsar for the second time peace reigns throughout the Empire."

"I am prouder of it," answered Nero, "than even of my immortal poetry. The gods know that I regard this world-peace as my greatest achievement."

"But it angers the patricians," said Tigellinus.

"Nevertheless it shall be kept," answered Nero, "for it is the desire and need of the common people who love their Cæsar."

So for the Emperor there began a new life on the day of Paul's death. And in the evening he gave a great banquet which was notable for the gluttony of the guests and for the drunkenness of Tigellinus and the women who were present. But Cæsar ate and drank little. He would cherish the voice that was later to be heard in the theatres of Greece, and for this cause practised abstemiousness.

As night fell, four men with lanterns drew near to the charnel pit. They went cautiously and gave a piece of money to the watchman, declaring that they came in search of a kinsman. Then they were permitted to enter that foul hole, and in a little while, because freshly cast there, they discovered the saint's body and drew it forth.

Tenderly these four—Luke, Mark, Timothy and Onesiphorus—wound the old cloak brought from Troas about their master. It had been woven by Lydia, the seller of purple, and bore remembrance to Luke of those golden days passed at Philippi. So his sorrow overwhelmed him and he wept bitterly as they carried the burden between them down the long white road towards home.

The moon had risen when they entered the garden and found Lucinia waiting there. Silently she kneeled before the body, and

then having bowed her head once to the earth, she and her women brought spices, and together they tended Paul, preparing him graciously, lovingly, for the tomb.

It was almost day when they laid him in the sepulchre and said the last words of prayer and farewell. Then, wearied and stricken, the four brethren turned away.

Lucinia remained alone at the open door of the tomb, and as the dawn came, scattering its silver largess once more over Rome, she remained dry-eyed, seated near the foot of the body; and her face was hard and white as the carven stone.

To the end of her day this woman from the barbarian isle watched by the Apostle's resting-place; no Gentile knew of her secret treasure and few brethren were aware that Paul lay there.

For Lucinia there came no mercy of martyrdom, no freedom through the torment of the fire or the cross. She remained the woman of mystery, alone with her grief, the guardian of the Apostle's tomb.

Three or four senators and generals murmured, "The clown of the Empire has gone to Greece; we may plot in full freedom."

Nero gained much glory—as he believed—in the year and a half he was among those islands, abject multitudes applauding his chariot racing and singing. Grateful for this welcome he gave freedom to the Greeks. On his journey back to Rome he was like a peacock flaunting its tail. Under Seneca's tutelage he had been humble in mind, but now, uplifted, he held that he was the greatest man of his time, of perhaps all time.

But the winds of fortune changed. Soon afterwards he was driven from his throne and compelled to take refuge at the villa of his freedman, Phaon, beyond Rome. He was a prey to terror, feared to take his own life and feared still more the tortures that awaited him in the Imperial city. Clad in a ragged tunic and cloak, he lay on a pallet upon the earth, moaning and crying. Phaon could not comfort or give courage to his master in that hour.

At last whimpering like a dog Nero exclaimed:

"Jupiter! what an artist is lost to the world—what an artist!" Then he stabbed himself and perished miserably.

Thus died Nero the lord of temporal power and Paul the lord of spiritual power—the one fearful in death, the other fearless—some thirty-five and thirty-three years after the crucifixion of Christ.

APPENDIX

Note on Wroxeter

FAR away from the noise and traffic of the modern world, in a quite remarkably lonely Shropshire pastureland, lie the ruins of the fourth largest city of Roman Britain: "Viroconium" or "Uroconium". These ruins do not, like so many "Roman Remains", consist of an odd tile here and there. They are sufficiently complete in their outline for the visitor to realize that here indeed has stood "No mean city" and even more is hidden under the surrounding fields. Portions of the Baths and Forum still rise high and can be seen from afar—imposing even now. The groundwork of shops and streets remains, and, were the money forthcoming, a reconstruction might be possible such as has been made at Pompeii. Few farmsteads or houses are to be seen in the immediate vicinity, though the presence of a nearby village of sorts is indicated by a little country shop at no great distance from these vestiges of a former glory. It bears the title "Wroxeter Post Office".

Did Pomponia Græcina know Uroconium? By name, almost certainly, for in the days of her husband's successor in the British Command, Ostorius Scapula, the General who finally defeated Caradoc, it served as base for two legions, XIV and XX, as is definitely proved by soldiers' tombstones on the spot. Plautius would have frequently mentioned the place, and Pomponia *may* have known it personally.

But to link it in thought with Londinium and Verulamium is a little surprising, as, unlike them, it was not in her day more than a garrison station. It may indeed have been a native "Caer", but these Caerau were, one suspects, pretty primitive places, even if seats of a Druidic College.

Serious building on Roman lines is first known to have been in progress in the years 80 and 81. The Forum was not completed till 130. In 160 the town was raided and sacked by the implacable Ordovices of North Wales. It was rebuilt, and flourished peacefully for nearly a century and a half. In 300 it was again sacked. . . .

The use of the name *Wroxeter* is a definite indication of a

Post-Roman origin of the Script. It was never so known to Pomponia. To the root "*Uroc*"—or "*Wroc*"—is attached a modified form of the Latin "*Castra*" (Camp) after the manner of "Glou-cestre," "Win-chester," "Isc-cestre" (thence "Exeter"). So here "*Wroc-cestre*"—"Wroxcester"—"Wroxeter". But this occurs only where Saxon penetration has taken place—that is to say, England.

Thus the fact that a town, or site, is named " . . . cester" indicates two things—(1) that it was once a Roman settlement of some kind, and (2) that it was afterwards occupied by Saxons.

The interesting thing about the occurrence of the form "*Wroxcester*" in the script is that it is not modernized into "*Wroxeter*". It would appear that the communicators had somehow got access to *Early English* sources as well as earlier "rolls", and got them somewhat mixed up.

B. A. L.