

Chapter 10. The Divine Callista

1 {111} THE day came which Agellius had fixed for paying his promised visit to Aristo. It is
2 not to be denied that, in the interval, the difficulties of the business which occasioned his
3 visit had increased upon his apprehensions. Callista was not yet a Christian, nor was
4 there any reason for saying that a proposal of marriage would make her one; and a
5 strange sort of convert she would be, if it did. He would not suffer himself to dwell upon
6 difficulties which he was determined never should be realized. No; of course a heathen
7 he could not marry, but a heathen Callista should not be. He did not see the process,
8 but he was convinced she would become a Christian. Yet somehow so it was, that, if he
9 was able to stultify his reason, he did not quite succeed to his satisfaction with his
10 conscience. Every morning found him less satisfied with himself, and more disposed to
11 repent of having allowed his uncle to enter on the subject with Aristo. But it was a thing
12 done and over; he must either awkwardly back out, or he must go on. His middle term,
13 as he hastily had considered it, was nothing else than siding with his uncle, and
14 committing {112} himself to go all lengths, unless some difficulty rose with the other
15 party. Yet could he really wish that the step had not been taken? Was it not plain that if
16 he was to put away Callista from his affections, he must never go near her? And was he
17 to fall back on his drear solitude, and lose that outlet of thought and relief of mind which
18 he had lately found in the society of his Greek friends?

19 We may easily believe that he was not very peaceful in heart when he set out on that
20 morning to call upon Aristo; yet he would not allow that he was doing wrong. He
21 recurred to the pleasant imagination that Callista would certainly become a Christian,
22 and dwelt pertinaciously upon it. He could not tell on what it was founded; he knew
23 enough of his religion not to mean that she was too good to be a heathen; so it is to be
24 supposed he meant that he discerned what he hoped were traces of some supernatural
25 influence operating upon her mind. He had a perception, which he could not justify by
26 argument, that there was in Callista a promise of something higher than anything she
27 yet was. He felt a strange sympathy with her, which certainly unless he utterly deceived
28 himself, was not based on anything merely natural or human,—a sympathy the more
29 remarkable from the contrariety which existed between them in matters of religious
30 belief. And hope having blown this large and splendid bubble, sent it sailing away, and it
31 rose upon the buoyant atmosphere of youth, beautiful to behold. {113}

32 And yet, as Agellius ascended the long flight of marble steps which led the foot-
33 passenger up into that fair city, while the morning sun was glancing across them, and
34 surveyed the outline of the many sumptuous buildings which crested and encircled the
35 hill, did he not know full well that iniquity was written on its very walls, and spoke a
36 solemn warning to a Christian heart to go out of it, to flee it, not to take up a home in it,
37 not to make alliance with anything in it? Did he not know from experience full well that,
38 when he got into it, his glance could no longer be unrestrained, or his air free; but that it
39 would be necessary for him to keep a control upon his senses, and painfully guard
40 himself against what must either be a terror to him and an abhorrence, or a temptation?
41 Enter in imagination into a town like Sicca, and you will understand the great Apostle's
42 anguish at seeing a noble and beautiful city given up to idolatry. Enter it, and you will

43 understand why it was that the poor priest, of whom Jucundus spoke so bitterly, hung
44 his head, and walked with timid eyes and clouded brow through the joyous streets of
45 Carthage. Hitherto we have only been conducting heathens through it, boys or men,
46 Jucundus, Arnobius, and Firmian; but now a Christian enters it with a Christian's heart
47 and a Christian's hope.

48 Well is it for us, dear reader, that we in this age do not experience—nay, a blessed thing
49 that we cannot even frame to ourselves in imagination—the actual details of evil which
50 hung as an atmosphere over the {114} cities of Pagan Rome. An Apostle calls the
51 tongue "a fire, a world of iniquity, untameable, a restless evil, a deadly poison;" and
52 surely what he says applies to hideous thoughts represented to the eye, as well as
53 when they are made to strike upon the ear. Unfortunate Agellius! what takes you into
54 the city this morning? Doubtless some urgent, compulsive duty; otherwise you would
55 not surely be threading its lanes or taking the circuit of its porticoes, amid sights which
56 now shock and now allure; fearful sights—not here and there, but on the stateliest
57 structures and in the meanest hovels, in public offices and private houses, in central
58 spots and at the corners of the streets, in bazaars and shops and house-doors, in the
59 rudest workmanship and in the highest art, in letters or in emblems or in paintings—the
60 insignia and the pomp of Satan and of Belial, of a reign of corruption and a revel of
61 idolatry which you can neither endure nor escape. Wherever you go it is all the same; in
62 the police-court on the right, in the military station on the left, in the crowd around the
63 temple, in the procession with its victims and its worshippers who walk to music, in the
64 language of the noisy market-people; wherever you go, you are accosted, confronted,
65 publicly, shamelessly, now as if a precept of religion, now as if a homage to nature, by
66 all which, as a Christian, you shrink from and abjure.

67 It is no accident of the season or of the day; it is the continuous tradition of some
68 thousands of years; it is the very orthodoxy of the myriads who have {115} lived and
69 died there. There was a region once, in an early age, lying upon the Eastern Sea, which
70 is said at length to have vomited out its inhabitants for their frightful iniquity. They, thus
71 cast forth, took ship, and passed over to the southern coast; and then, gradually settling
72 and spreading into the interior, they peopled the woody plains and fertile slopes of
73 Africa, and filled it with their cities. Sicca is one of these set up in sin; and at the time of
74 which we write that sin was basking under the sun, and rioting and extending itself to its
75 amplest dimensions, like some glittering serpent or spotted pard of the neighbourhood,
76 without interposition from heaven or earth in correction of so awful a degradation. In
77 such scenes of unspeakable pollution, our Christian forefathers perforce lived; through
78 such a scene, though not taking part in it, Agellius, blessed with a country home, is
79 unnecessarily passing.

80 He has reached the house, or rather the floor, to which he has been making his way. It
81 is at the back of the city, where the rock is steep; and it looks out upon the plain and the
82 mountain range to the north. Its inmates, Aristo and Callista, are engaged in their
83 ordinary work of moulding or carving, painting or gilding the various articles which the
84 temples or the private shrines of the established religion required. Aristo has received
85 from Jucundus the overtures which Agellius had commissioned him to make, and finds,

86 as he anticipated, that they are no great news to his sister. She perfectly understands
87 what is going {116} on, but does not care to speak much upon it, till Agellius makes his
88 appearance. As they sit at work, Aristo speaks:—

89 "Agellius will make his appearance here this morning. I say, Callista, what can he be
90 coming for?"

91 "Why, if your news be true, that the Christians are coming into trouble, of course he
92 means to purchase, as a blessing on him, some of these bits of gods."

93 "You are sharp enough, my little sister," answered Aristo, "to know perfectly well who is
94 the goddess he is desirous of purchasing."

95 Callista laughed carelessly, but made no reply. "Come, child," Aristo continued, "don't
96 be cruel to him. Wreath a garland for him by the time he comes. He's well to do, and
97 modest withal, and needs encouragement."

98 "He's well enough," said Callista.

99 "I say he's a fellow too well off to be despised as a lover," proceeded her brother, "and it
100 would be a merit with the gods to rid him of his superstition."

101 "Not much of a Christian," she made answer, "if he is set upon me."

102 "For whose sake has he been coming here so often, mine or yours, Callista?"

103 "I am tired of such engagements," she replied. She went on with her painting, and
104 several times seemed as if she would have spoken, but did not. Then, without
105 interrupting her work, she said calmly, "Time was, it gratified my conceit and my feelings
106 to have hangers on. Indeed, without them, how {117} should we have had means to
107 come here? But there's a weariness in all things."

108 "A weariness! Where is this bad humour to end?" cried Aristo; "it has been a long fit;
109 shake it off while you can, or it will be too much for you. What can you mean? a
110 weariness! You are over young to bid youth farewell. Aching hearts for aching bones.
111 So young and so perverse! We must take things as the gods give them. You will ask for
112 them in vain when you are old. One day above, another day beneath; one while young,
113 another while old. Enjoy life while you have it in your hand." He had said this as he
114 worked. Then he stopped, and turned round to her, with his graving-tool in his hand.
115 "Recollect old Lesbia, how she used to squeak out to me, with her nodding head and
116 trembling limbs"—here he mimicked the old crone—"My boy, take your pleasure while
117 you can. I can't take pleasure—my day is over; but I don't reproach myself. I had a
118 merry time of it while it lasted. Time stops for no one, but I did my best; I don't reproach
119 myself.' There's the true philosopher, though a slave; more outspoken than Æsop, more
120 practical than Epictetus."

121 Callista began singing to herself:—

122 "I wander by that river's brink
123 Which circles Pluto's drear domain;
124 I feel the chill night breeze, and think
125 Of joys which ne'er shall be again.

126 "I count the weeds that fringe the shore,
127 Each sluggish wave that rolls and rolls;
128 I hear the ever-splashing oar
129 Of Charon, ferryman of souls. {118}

130 "Heigho!" she continued, "little regret, but much dread. The young have to fear more
131 than the old have to mourn over. The future outweighs the past. Life is not so sweet as
132 death is bitter. It is hard to quit the light, the light of heaven."

133 "Callistidion!" he said, impatiently; "my girl, this is preposterous. How long is this to go
134 on? We must take you to Carthage; there is more trade there, if we can get it; and it will
135 be on the bright, far-resounding sea. And I will turn rhetorician, and you shall feed my
136 classes."

137 "O beautiful, divine light," she continued, "what a loss! O, to think that one day I must
138 lose you for ever! At home I used to lie awake at night longing for the morning, and
139 crying out for the god of day. It was like choice wine to me, a cup of Chian, the first
140 streaks of the Aurora, and I could hardly bear his bright coming, when he came to me
141 like Semele, for rapture. How gloriously did he shoot over the hills! and then anon he
142 rested awhile on the snowy summit of Olympus, as in some luminous shrine,
143 gladdening the Phrygian plain. Fair, bright-haired god! thou art my worship, if Callista
144 worships aught: but somehow I worship nothing now. I am weary."

145 "Well," said her brother in a soothing tone, "it *is* a change. That light, elastic air, that
146 transparent heaven, that fresh temperate breeze, that majestic sea! Africa is not
147 Greece; O, the difference! That's it, Callista; it is the *nostalgia*; you are home-sick."

148 "It may be so," she said; "I do not well know {119} what I would have. Yes, the
149 poisonous dews, the heavy heat, the hideous beasts, the green fever-gendering
150 swamps. This vast thickly-wooded plain, like some mysterious labyrinth, oppresses and
151 disquiets me with its very richness. The luxuriant foliage, the tall, rank plants, the deep,
152 close lanes, I do not see my way through them, and I pant for breath. I only breathe
153 freely on this hill. O, how unlike Greece, with the clear, soft, delicate colouring of its
154 mountains, and the pure azure or the purple of its waters!"

155 "But, my dear Callista," interrupted her brother, "recollect you are not in those
156 oppressive, gloomy forests, but in Sicca, and no one asks you to penetrate them. And if
157 you want mountains, I think those on the horizon are bare enough."

158 "And the race of man," she continued, "is worse than all. Where is the genius of our
159 bright land? where its intelligence, playfulness, grace, and noble bearing? Here hearts
160 are as black as brows, and smiles as treacherous as the adders of the wood. The
161 natives are crafty and remorseless; they never relax; they have no cheerfulness or
162 mirth; their very love is a furnace, and their sole ecstasy is revenge."

163 "No country like home to any of us," said Aristo; "yet here you are. Habit would be a
164 second nature if you were here long enough; your feelings would become acclimated,
165 and would find a new home. People get to like the darkness of the extreme north in
166 course of time. The painted Britons, the Cimmerians, the Hyperboreans, are content
167 never to see the {120} sun at all, which is your god. Here your own god reigns; why
168 quarrel with him?"

169 "The sun of Greece is light," answered Callista; "the sun of Africa is fire. I am no fire-
170 worshipper."

171 "I suspect even Styx and Phlegethon are tolerable, at length," said her brother, "if
172 Phlegethon and Styx there be, as the poets tell us."

173 "The cold, foggy Styx is the north," said Callista, "and the south is the scorching,
174 blasting Phlegethon, and Greece, clear, sweet, and sunny, is the Elysian fields." And
175 she continued her improvisations:—

176 "Where are the islands of the blest?
177 They stud the Ægean sea;
178 And where the deep Elysian rest?
179 It haunts the vale where Peneus strong
180 Pours his incessant stream along,
181 While craggy ridge and mountain bare
182 Cut keenly through the liquid air,
183 And, in their own pure tints arrayed,
184 Scorn earth's green robes which change and fade,
185 And stand in beauty undecayed,
186 Guards of the bold and free."

187 "A lower flight, if you please, just now," said Aristo, interrupting her. "I do really wish a
188 serious word with you about Agellius. He's a fellow I can't help liking, in spite of his
189 misanthropy. Let me plead his cause. Like him or not yourself, still he has a full purse;
190 and you will do a service to yourself and to the gods of Greece, and to him too, if you
191 will smile on him. Smile on him at least for a time; we will go to Carthage when you are
192 tired. His looks have very little in them of a Christian left; you may blow it away with your
193 breath." {121}

194 "One might do worse than be a Christian," she answered slowly, "if all is true that I have
195 heard of them."

196 Aristo started up in irritation. "By all the gods of Olympus," he said, "this is intolerable! If
197 a man wants a tormentor, I commend him to a girl like you. What has ailed thee some
198 time past, you silly child? What have I done to you that you should have got so cross
199 and contrary and so hard to please?"

200 "I mean," she said, "if I were a Christian, life would be more bearable."

201 "Bearable!" he echoed; "bearable! ye gods! more bearable to have Styx and Tartarus,
202 the Furies and their snakes, in this world as well as in the next? to have evil within and
203 without, to hate one's self and to be hated of all men! to live the life of an ass, and to die
204 the death of a dog! Bearable! But hark! I hear Agellius's step on the staircase. Callista,
205 dear Callista, be yourself. Listen to reason."

206 But Callista would not listen to reason, if her brother was its embodiment; but went on
207 with her singing:—

208 "For what is Afric but the home
209 Of burning Phlegethon?
210 What the low beach and silent gloom,
211 And chilling mists of that dull river,
212 Along whose bank the thin ghosts shiver,
213 The thin, wan ghosts that once were men,
214 But Tauris, isle of moor and fen;
215 Or, dimly traced by seaman's ken,
216 The pale-cuffed Albion?"

217 Here she stopped, looked down, and busied herself with her work.

Chapter 11. Callista's Preaching, and What Came of it

218 {122} IT is undeniably a solemn moment, under any circumstances, and requires a
219 strong heart, when any one deliberately surrenders himself, soul and body, to the
220 keeping of another while life shall last; and this, or something like this, reserving the
221 supreme claim of duty to the Creator, is the matrimonial contract. In individual cases it
222 may be made without thought or distress, but surveyed objectively, and as carried out
223 into a sufficient range of instances, it is so tremendous an undertaking that nature
224 seems to sink under its responsibilities. When the Christian binds himself by vows to a
225 religious life, he makes a surrender to Him who is all-perfect, and whom he may
226 unreservedly trust. Moreover, looking at that surrender on its human side, he has the
227 safeguard of distinct *provisos* and regulations, and of the principles of theology, to
228 secure him against tyranny on the part of his superiors. But what shall be his
229 encouragement to make himself over, without condition or stipulation, as an absolute
230 property, to a fallible being, and that not for a season, but for life? The mind shrinks
231 from such a sacrifice, and demands that, as {123} religion enjoins it, religion should
232 sanction and bless it. It instinctively desires that either the bond should be dissoluble, or

233 that the subjects of it should be sacramentally strengthened to maintain it. "So help me
234 God," the formula of every oath, is emphatically necessary here.

235 But Agellius is contemplating a superhuman engagement without superhuman
236 assistance; and that in a state of society in which public opinion, which in some sense
237 compensates for the absence of religion, supplied human motives, not for, but against
238 keeping it, and with one who had given no indication that she understood what marriage
239 meant. No wonder then, that, in spite of his simplicity, his sanguine temperament, and
240 his delusion, the more he thought of the step he had taken, the more unsatisfactory he
241 found it, and the nearer he grew to the time when he must open the subject with Aristo,
242 the less he felt able to do so. In consequence he was in a distress of mind, as he
243 ascended the staircase which led to his friend's lodging, to which his anxiety, as he
244 mounted the hill on the other side of the city, was tranquillity itself; and, except that he
245 was coming by engagement, he would have turned back, and for the time at least have
246 put the whole subject from his thoughts. Yet even then, as often as Callista rose in his
247 mind's eye, his scruples and misgivings vanished before the beauty of that image, as
248 mists before the sun; and when he actually stood in her sweet presence, it seemed as if
249 some secret emanation from {124} her flowed in upon his heart, and he stood
250 breathless and giddy under the intensity of the fascination.

251 However, the reader must not suppose that in the third century of our era such
252 negotiations as that which now seems to be on the point of coming off between Callista
253 and Agellius, were embellished with those transcendental sentiments and that
254 magnificent ceremonial with which chivalry has invested them in these latter ages.
255 There was little occasion then for fine speaking or exquisite deportment; and if there
256 had been, we, who are the narrators of these hitherto unrecorded transactions, should
257 have been utterly unable to do justice to them. At that time of day the Christian had too
258 much simplicity, the heathen too little of real delicacy, to indulge in the sublimities of
259 modern love-making, at least as it is found in novels; and in the case before us both
260 gentleman and lady will be thought, we consider, sadly matter-of-fact, or rather semi-
261 barbarous, by the votaries of what is just now called European civilization.

262 On Agellius's entering the room, Aristo was pacing to and fro in some discomposure;
263 however, he ran up to his friend, embraced him, and, looking at him with significance,
264 congratulated him on his good looks. "There is more fire in your eye," he said, "dear
265 Agellius, and more eloquence in the turn of your lip, than I have ever yet seen. A new
266 spirit is in you. So you are determined to come out of your solitude? That you should
267 have been able to exist in it so long is the wonderment to me." {125}

268 Agellius had recovered himself, yet he dared not look again on Callista. "Do not jest,
269 Aristo," he said; "I am come, as you know, to talk to you about your sister. I have
270 brought her a present of flowers; they are my best present, or rather not mine, but the
271 birth of the opening year, as fair and fragrant as herself."

272 "We will offer them to our Pallas Athena," said his friend, "to whom we artists are
273 especially devout." And he would have led Agellius on, and made him place them in her
274 niche in the opposite wall.

275 "I am more serious than you are," said Agellius; "and I have brought the best my garden
276 contains as an offering to your sister. *She* will not think I bring them for any other
277 purpose. Where are you going?" he continued, as he saw his friend take down his
278 broad *petasus*.

279 "Why," answered Aristo, "since I am so poor an interpreter of your meaning, you can
280 dispense with me altogether. I will leave you to speak for yourself, and meanwhile will
281 go and see what old Dromo has to tell, before the sun is too high in the heavens."

282 Saying this, with a half-imploring, half-satirical look at his sister, he set off to the barber's
283 at the Forum.

284 Agellius took up the flowers, and laid them on the table before her, as she sat at work.
285 "Do you accept my flowers, Callista?" he asked.

286 "Fair and fragrant, like myself, are they?" she made reply. "Give them to me." She took
287 them, and bent over them. "The blushing rose," she said, {126} gravely, "the stately lily,
288 the royal carnation, the golden moly, the purple amaranth, the green bryon, the
289 diosanthos, the sertula, the sweet modest salianca, fit emblems of Callista. Well, in a
290 few hours they will have faded; yes, they will get more and more like her."

291 She paused and looked him steadily in the face, and then continued: "Agellius, I once
292 had a slave who belonged to your religion. She had been born in a Christian family, and
293 came into my possession on her master's death. She was unlike any one I have seen
294 before or since; she cared for nothing, yet was not morose or peevish or hard-hearted.
295 She died young in my service. Shortly before her end she had a dream. She saw a
296 company of bright shades, clothed in white, like the hours which circle round the god of
297 day. They were crowned with flowers, and they said to each other, 'She ought to have a
298 token too.' So they took her hand, and led her to a most beautiful lady, as stately as
299 Juno and as sweet as Ariadne, so radiant in countenance that they themselves
300 suddenly looked like Ethiopians by the side of her. She, too, was crowned with flowers,
301 and these so dazzling that they might be the stars of heaven or the gems of Asia for
302 what Chione could tell. And that fair goddess (angel you call her) said, 'My dear, here is
303 something for you from my Son. He sends you by me a red rose for your love, a white
304 lily for your chastity, purple violets to strew your grave, and green palms to flourish over
305 it.' Is this the reason why you give me {127} flowers, Agellius, that I may rank with
306 Chione? and is this their interpretation?"

307 "Callista," he answered, "it is my heart's most fervent wish, it is my mind's vivid
308 anticipation, that the day may come when you will receive such a crown, nay, a brighter
309 one."

310 "And you are come, of course, to philosophize to me, and to put me in the way of dying
311 like Chione," she made answer. "I implore your pardon. You are offering me flowers, it
312 seems, not for a bridal wreath, but for a funeral urn."

313 "Is it wonderful," said Agellius, "that the two wishes should have gone together in my
314 heart; and that while I trusted and prayed that you might have the same Master in
315 heaven as I have myself, I also hoped you would have the same service, the same
316 aims, the same home upon earth?"

317 "And that you should speak one word for your Master and two for yourself!" she
318 retorted.

319 "It has been by feeling how much you could be to me," he answered, "that I have been
320 led to think how much my Master may be doing for you already, and how much in time
321 to come you might do for Him. Callista, do not urge me with your Greek subtlety, or
322 expect me to analyze my feelings more precisely than I have the ability to do. May I
323 calmly tell you the state of my mind, as I do know it, and will you patiently listen?"

324 She signified her willingness, and he continued—"This only I know," he said, "what I
325 have experienced {128} ever since I first heard you converse, that there is between you
326 and me a unity of thought so strange that I should have deemed it could not have been,
327 before I found it actually to exist, between any two persons whatever; and which, widely
328 as we are separated in opinion and habit, and differently as we have been brought up,
329 is to me inexplicable. I find it difficult to explain what I mean; we disagree certainly on
330 the most important subjects, yet there is an unaccountable correspondence in the views
331 we take of things, in our impressions, in the line in which our minds move, and the
332 issues to which they come, in our judgment of what is great and little, and the manner in
333 which objects affect our feelings. When I speak to my uncle, when I speak to your
334 brother, I do not understand them, nor they me. We are moving in different spheres, and
335 I am solitary, however much they talk. But to my astonishment, I find between you and
336 me one language. Is it wonderful that, in proportion to my astonishment, I am led to
337 refer it to one cause, and think that one Master Hand must have engraven those lines
338 on the soul of each of us? Is it wonderful that I should fancy that He who has made us
339 alike has made us for each other, and that the very same persuasives by which I bring
340 you to cast your eyes on me, may draw you also to cast yourself in adoration at the feet
341 of my Master?"

342 For an instant tears seemed about to start from Callista's eyes, but she repressed the
343 emotion, if it were such, and answered with impetuosity, "Your Master! {129} who is
344 your Master? what know I of your Master? what have you ever told me of your Master? I
345 suppose it is an esoteric doctrine which I am not worthy to know; but so it is, here you
346 have been again and again, and talked freely of many things, yet I am in as much
347 darkness about your Master as if I had never seen you. I know He died; I know too that
348 Christians say He lives. In some fortunate island, I suppose; for, when I have asked,
349 you have got rid of the subject as best you could. You have talked about your law and
350 your various duties, and what you consider right, and what is forbidden, and of some of

351 the old writers of your sect, and of the Jews before them; but if, as you imply, my wants
352 and aspirations are the same as yours, what have you done towards satisfying them?
353 what have you done for that Master towards whom you now propose to lead me? No!"
354 she continued, starting up, "you have watched those wants and aspirations for yourself,
355 not for Him; you have taken interest in them, you have cherished them, as if you were
356 the author, you the object of them. You profess to believe in One True God, and to
357 reject every other; and now you are implying that the Hand, the Shadow of that God is
358 on my mind and heart. Who is this God? where? how? in what? O Agellius, you have
359 stood in the way of Him, ready to speak for yourself, using Him as a means to an end."

360 "O Callista," said Agellius, in an agitated voice, when he could speak, "do my ears hear
361 aright? do you really wish to be taught who the true God is?" {130}

362 "No, mistake me not," she cried passionately, "I have no such wish. I could not be of
363 your religion. Ye Gods! how have I been deceived! I thought every Christian was like
364 Chione. I thought there could not be a cold Christian. Chione spoke as if a Christian's
365 first thoughts were goodwill to others; as if his state were of such blessedness, that his
366 dearest heart's wish was to bring others into it. Here is a man who, so far from feeling
367 himself blest, thinks I can bless him! comes to me—me, Callista, a herb of the field, a
368 poor weed, exposed to every wind of heaven, and shrivelling before the fierce sun—to
369 me he comes to repose his heart upon. But as for any blessedness he has to show me,
370 why, since he does not feel any himself, no wonder he has none to give away. I thought
371 a Christian was superior to time and place; but all is hollow. Alas, alas, I am young in life
372 to feel the force of that saying, with which sages go out of it, 'Vanity and hollowness!'
373 Agellius, when I first heard you were a Christian, how my heart beat! I thought of her
374 who was gone; and at first I thought I saw her in you, as if there had been some magical
375 sympathy between you and her; and I hoped that from you I might have learned more of
376 that strange strength which my nature needs, and which she told me she possessed.
377 Your words, your manner, your looks were altogether different from others who came
378 near me. But so it was; you came, and you went, and came again; I thought it reserve, I
379 thought it timidity, I thought it the caution of a persecuted sect; but O, my
380 disappointment, {131} when first I saw in you indications that you were thinking of me
381 only as others think, and felt towards me as others may feel; that you were aiming at
382 me, not at your God; that you had much to tell of yourself, but nothing of Him! Time was
383 I might have been led to worship you, Agellius; you have hindered it by
384 worshipping *me*."

385 It is not often, we suppose, that such deep offence is given to a lady by the sort of
386 admiration of which Agellius had been guilty in the case of Callista; however, startled as
387 he might be, and startled and stung he was, there was too much earnestness in her
388 distress, too much of truth in her representations, too much which came home to his
389 heart and conscience, to allow of his being affronted or irritated. She had but supplied
390 the true interpretation of the misgiving which had haunted him that morning, from the
391 time he set out till the moment of his entering the room. Jucundus some days back had
392 readily acquiesced in his assurance that he was not inconsistent; but Callista had not
393 been so indulgent, though really more merciful. There was a pause in the conversation,

394 or rather in her outpouring; each had bitter thoughts, and silently devoured them. At
395 length, she began again:—

396 "So the religion of Chione is a dream; now for four years I had hoped it was a reality. All
397 things again are vanity; I had hoped there was something somewhere more than I could
398 see, but there is nothing. Here am I a living, breathing woman, with an overflowing {132}
399 heart, with keen affections, with a yearning after some object which may possess me. I
400 cannot exist without something to rest upon. I cannot fall back upon that drear, forlorn
401 state, which philosophers call wisdom, and moralists call virtue. I cannot enrol myself a
402 votary of that cold Moon, whose arrows do but freeze me. I cannot sympathize in that
403 majestic band of sisters whom Rome has placed under the tutelage of Vesta. I must
404 have something to love; love is my life. Why do you come to me, Agellius, with your
405 every-day gallantry. Can you compete with the noble Grecian forms which have passed
406 before my eyes? Is your voice more manly, are its tones more eloquent, than those
407 which have thrilled through my ears since I ceased to be a child? Can you add perfume
408 to the feast by your wit, or pour sunshine over grot and rushing stream by your
409 smile? *What* can you give me? There was one thing which I thought you *could* have
410 given me, better than anything else; but it is a shadow. You have nothing to give. You
411 have thrown me back upon my dreary, dismal self, and the deep wounds of my memory
412 ... Poor, poor Agellius! but it was not his fault, it could not be helped," she continued, as
413 if in thought; "it could not be helped; for, if he had nothing to give, how could he give it?
414 After all, he wanted something to love, just as I did; and he could find nothing better
415 than me ... And they thought to persuade her to spend herself upon him, as she had
416 spent herself upon others. Yes, it was Jucundus and Aristo— {133} my brother, even
417 my own brother. They thought not of *me*." Here her tears gushed out violently, and she
418 abandoned herself to a burst of emotion. "They were thinking of *him*. I had hoped he
419 could lead me to what was higher; but woe, woe!" she cried, wringing her hands, "they
420 thought I was only fit to bring him low. Well; after all, *is* Callista really good for much
421 more than the work they have set her to do?"

422 She was absorbed in her own misery in an intense sense of degradation, in a keen
423 consciousness of the bondage of nature, in a despair of ever finding what alone could
424 give meaning to her existence, and an object to her intellect and affections. And Agellius
425 on the other hand, what surprise, remorse, and humiliation came upon him! It was a
426 strange contrast, the complaint of nature unregenerate on the one hand, the self-
427 reproach of nature regenerate and lapsing on the other. At last he spoke, and they were
428 his last words.

429 "Callista," he said, "whatever injury I may have unwillingly inflicted upon you, you at
430 least have returned me good for evil, and have made yourself my benefactress.
431 Certainly, I now know myself better than I did; and He who has made use of you as His
432 instrument of mercy towards me, will not forget to reward you tenfold. One word will I
433 say for myself; nay, not for myself, but for my Master. Do not for an instant suppose that
434 what you thought of the Christian religion is not true. It reveals a present God, who
435 satisfies every affection of the heart, yet {134} keeps it pure. I serve a Master," he
436 continued, blushing from modesty and earnestness as he spoke, "I serve a Master

437 whose love is stronger than created love. God help my inconsistency! but I never meant
438 to love you as I love Him. You are destined for His love. I commit you to Him, your true
439 Lord, whom I never ought to have rivalled, for whom I ought simply to have pleaded.
440 Though I am not worthy to approach you, I shall trace you at a distance, who knows
441 where? perhaps even to the prison and to the arena of those who confess the Saviour
442 of men, and dare to suffer and die for His name. And now, farewell; to His keeping and
443 that of His holy martyrs I commit you."

444 He did not trust himself to look at her as he turned to the door, and left the room.