

1 Chapter 3. Agellius in his Cottage

2 {25} THE cottage for which Agellias was making, when last we had sight of him, was a  
3 small brick house consisting of one room, with a loft over it, and a kitchen on the side,  
4 not very unlike that holy habitation which once contained the Eternal Word in human  
5 form with His Virgin Mother, and Joseph, their guardian. It was situated on the declivity  
6 of the hill, and, unlike the gardens of Italy, the space before it was ornamented with a  
7 plot of turf. A noble palm on one side, in spite of its distance from the water, and a group  
8 of orange-trees on the other, formed a foreground to the rich landscape which was  
9 described in our opening chapter. The borders and beds were gay with the lily, the  
10 bacchar, amber-coloured and purple, the golden abrotomus, the red chelidonium, and  
11 the variegated iris. Against the wall of the house were trained pomegranates, with their  
12 crimson blossoms, the star-like pothos or jessamine, and the symbolical passion-flower,  
13 which well became a Christian dwelling.

14 And it was an intimation of what would be found within; for on one side of the room was  
15 rudely painted a red cross, with doves about it, as is found in early {26} Christian  
16 shrines to this day. So long had been the peace of the Church, that the tradition of  
17 persecution seemed to have been lost; and Christians allowed themselves in the  
18 profession of their faith at home, cautious as they might be in public places; as freely as  
19 now in England, where we do not scruple to raise crucifixes within our churches and  
20 houses, though we shrink from doing so within sight of the hundred cabs and  
21 omnibuses which rattle past them. Under the cross were two or three pictures, or rather  
22 sketches. In the centre stood the Blessed Virgin with hands spread out in prayer,  
23 attended by the holy Apostles Peter and Paul on her right and left. Under this  
24 representation was rudely scratched upon the wall the word, "Advocata," a title which  
25 the earliest antiquity bestows upon her. On a small shelf was placed a case with two or  
26 three rolls or sheets of parchment in it. The appearance of them spoke of use indeed,  
27 but of reverential treatment. These were the Psalms, the Gospel according to St. Luke,  
28 and St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, in the old Latin version. The Gospel was  
29 handsomely covered, and ornamented with gold.

30 The apartment was otherwise furnished with such implements and materials as might  
31 be expected in the cottage of a countryman: one or two stools and benches for sitting, a  
32 table, and in one corner a heap of dried leaves and rushes, with a large crimson  
33 coverlet, for rest at night. Elsewhere were two mill-stones fixed in a frame, with a handle  
34 attached to the {27} rim of one of them, for grinding corn. Then again, garden tools;  
35 boxes of seeds; a vessel containing syrup for assuaging the sting of the scorpion;  
36 the *asir-rese* or *anagallis*, a potent medicine of the class of poisons, which was taken in  
37 wine for the same mischance. It hung from the beams, with a large bunch of *atsirtiphua*,  
38 a sort of camomile, smaller in the flower and more fragrant than our own, which was  
39 used as a febrifuge. Thence, too, hung a plentiful gathering of dried grapes, of the kind  
40 called *duracinæ*; and near the door a bough of the green *bargut* or *psyllium*, to drive  
41 away the smaller insects.

42 Poor Agellius felt the contrast between the ungodly turmoil from which he had escaped,  
43 and the deep stillness into which he now had entered; but neither satisfied him quite.  
44 There was no repose out of doors, and no relief within. He was lonely at home, lonely in  
45 the crowd. He needed the sympathy of his kind, hearts which might beat with his heart,  
46 friends with whom he might share his joys and griefs, advisers whom he might consult,  
47 minds like his own, who would understand him—minds unlike his own, who would  
48 succour and respond to him. A very great trial certainly this, in which the soul is flung  
49 back upon itself; and that especially in the case of the young, for whom memory and  
50 experience do so little, and wayward and excited feelings do so much. Great gain had it  
51 been for Agellius, even in its natural effect, putting aside higher benefits, to have been  
52 able to recur to sacramental confession; but to {28} confession he had never been,  
53 though once or twice he had attended the public *homologesis* of the Church. Shall we  
54 wonder that the poor youth began to be despondent and impatient under his trial? Shall  
55 we not feel for him, though we may be sorry for him, should it turn out that he was  
56 looking restlessly into every corner of the small world of acquaintance in which his lot  
57 lay, for those with whom he could converse easily, and interchange speculation,  
58 argument, aspiration, and affection?

59 "No one cares for me," he said, as he sat down on his rustic bench. "I am nothing to any  
60 one; I am a hermit, like Elias or John, without the call to be one. Yet even Elias felt the  
61 burden of being one against many; even John asked at length in expostulation, 'Art  
62 Thou He that shall come?' Am I for ever to have the knowledge, without the consolation,  
63 of the truth? am I for ever to belong to a great divine society, yet never see the face of  
64 any of its members?"

65 He paused in his thoughts, as if drinking in the full taste and measure of his  
66 unhappiness. And then his reflections took a turn, and he said, suddenly, "Why do I not  
67 leave Sicca? What binds me to my father's farm? I am young, and my interest in it will  
68 soon expire. What keeps me from Carthage, Hippo, Cirtha, where Christians are so  
69 many?" But here he stopped as suddenly as he had begun; and a strange feeling, half  
70 pang, half thrill, went through his heart. And he felt unwilling to pursue his thought, or to  
71 answer the question which he had asked; and he {29} settled into a dull, stagnant  
72 condition of mind, in which he seemed hardly to think at all.

73 Be of good cheer, solitary one, though thou art not a hero yet! There is One that cares  
74 for thee, and loves thee, more than thou canst feel, love, or care for thyself. Cast all thy  
75 care upon Him. He sees thee, and is watching thee; He is hanging over thee, and  
76 smiles in compassion at thy troubles. His angel, who is thine, is whispering good  
77 thoughts to thee. He knows thy weakness; He foresees thy errors; but He holds thee by  
78 thy right hand, and thou shalt not, canst not escape Him. By thy faith, which thou hast  
79 so simply, resolutely retained in the midst of idolatry; by thy purity, which, like some fair  
80 flower, thou hast cherished in the midst of pollution, He will remember thee in thy evil  
81 hour, and thine enemy shall not prevail against thee!

82 What means that smile upon Agellius's face? It is the response of the child to the loving  
83 parent. He knows not why, but the cloud is past. He signs himself with the holy cross,

84 and sweet reviving thoughts enliven him. He names the sacred Name, and it is like  
85 ointment poured out upon his soul. He rises; he kneels down under the dread symbol of  
86 his salvation; and he begins his evening prayer.

#### 87 Chapter 4. Juba

88 {30} THERE was more of heart, less of effort, less of mechanical habit, in Agellius's  
89 prayers that night, than there had been for a long while before. He got up, struck a light,  
90 and communicated it to his small earthen lamp. Its pale rays feebly searched the room  
91 and discovered at the other end of it Juba, who had silently opened the door, and sat  
92 down near it, while his brother was employed upon his devotions. The countenance of  
93 the latter fell, for he was not to go to sleep with the resignation and peace which had  
94 just before been poured into his breast. Yet why should he complain? we receive  
95 consolation in this world for the very purpose of preparing us against trouble to come.  
96 Juba was a tall, swarthy, wild-looking youth. He was holding his head on one side as he  
97 sat, and his face towards the roof; he nodded obliquely, arched his eyebrows, pursed up  
98 his lips, and crossed his arms, while he gave utterance to a strange, half-whispered  
99 laugh.

100 "He, he, he!" he cried; "so you are on your knees, Agellius."

101 "Why shouldn't I be at this hour," answered Agellius, "and before I go to bed?" {31}

102 "O, every one to his taste, of course," said Juba; "but to an unprejudiced mind there is  
103 something unworthy in the act."

104 "Why, Juba?" said his brother somewhat sharply; "don't you profess any religion at all?"

105 "Perhaps I do, and perhaps I don't," answered Juba; "but never shall it be a bowing and  
106 scraping, crawling and cringing religion. You may take your oath of that."

107 "What ails you to come here at this time of night?" asked Agellius; "who asked for your  
108 company?"

109 "I will come just when I please," said the other, "and go when I please. I won't give an  
110 account of my actions to any one, God or man, devil or priest, much less to you. What  
111 right have you to ask me?"

112 "Then," said Agellius, "you'll never get peace or comfort as long as you live, that I can  
113 tell you, let alone the life to come."

114 Juba kept silent for awhile, and bit his nails with a smile on his face, and his eyes  
115 looking askance upon the ground. "I want no more than I have; I am well content," he  
116 said.

117 "Contented with yourself," retorted Agellius.

118 "Of course," Juba replied; "whom ought one to wish rather to content?"

119 "I suppose, your Creator."

120 "Creator," answered Juba, tossing back his head with an air of superiority; "Creator;—  
121 that, I consider, is an assumption." {32}

122 "O, my dear brother," cried Agellius, "don't go on in that dreadful way!"

123 "'Go on!' who began? Is one man to lay down the law, and not the other too? Is it so  
124 generally received, this belief of a Creator? Who have brought in the belief? The  
125 Christians. 'Tis the Christians that began it. The world went on very well without it before  
126 their rise. And now, who began the dispute but you?"

127 "Well, if I did," answered Agellius; "but I didn't. *You* began in coming here; what in the  
128 world are you come for? by what right do you disturb me at this hour?"

129 There was no appearance of anger in Juba; he seemed as free from feeling of every  
130 kind, from what is called *heart*, as if he had been a stone. In answer to his brother's  
131 question, he quietly said, "I have been down there," pointing in the direction of the  
132 woods.

133 An expression of sharp anguish passed over his brother's face, and for a moment he  
134 was silent. At length he said, "You don't mean to say you have been down to poor  
135 mother?"

136 "I do," said Juba.

137 There was again a silence for a little while; then Agellius renewed the conversation.  
138 "You have fallen off sadly, Juba, in the course of the last several years."

139 Juba tossed his head, and crossed his legs.

140 "At one time I thought you would have been baptized," his brother continued.

141 "That was my weakness," answered Juba; "it was {33} a weak moment: it was just after  
142 the old bishop's death. He had been kind to me as a child; and he said some womanish  
143 words to me, and it was excusable in me."

144 "Oh that you had yielded to your wish!" cried Agellius.

145 Juba looked superior. "The fit passed," he said. "I have come to a juster view of things.  
146 It is not every one who has the strength of mind. I consider that a logical head comes to  
147 a very different conclusion;" and he began wagging his own, to the right and left, as if it  
148 were coming to a great many.

149 "Well," said Agellius, gaping, and desiring at least to come to a conclusion of the  
150 altercation, "what brings you here so late?"

151 "I was on my way to Jucundus," he answered, "and have been delayed by the Succoth-  
152 benoth in the grove across the river."

153 Here they were thrown back upon their controversy. Agellius turned quite white. "My  
154 poor fellow," he said, "what were you there for?"

155 "To see the world," answered Juba; "it's unmanly not to see it. Why shouldn't I see it? It  
156 was good fun. I despise them all, fools and idiots. There they were, scampering about,  
157 or lying like hogs, all in liquor. Apes and swine! However, I will do as others do, if I  
158 please. I will be as drunk as they, when I see good. I am my own master, and it would  
159 be no kind of harm." {34}

160 "No harm! why, is it no harm to become an ape or a hog?"

161 "You don't take just views of human nature," answered Juba, with a self-satisfied air.  
162 "Our first duty is to seek our own happiness. If a man thinks it happier to be a hog, why,  
163 let him be a hog," and he laughed. "This is where you are narrow-minded. I shall seek  
164 my own happiness, and try this way, if I please."

165 "Happiness!" cried Agellius; "where have you been picking up all this stuff? Can you call  
166 such detestable filth happiness?"

167 "What do you know about such matters?" asked Juba. "Did you ever see them? Did you  
168 ever try them? You would be twice the man you are if you had. You will not be a man till  
169 you do. You are carried off your legs in your own way. I'd rather get drunk every day  
170 than fall down on all fours as you do, crawling on your stomach like a worm, and  
171 whining like a hound that has been beaten."

172 "Now, as I live, you shan't stop here one instant longer!" cried out Agellius, starting up.  
173 "Be off with you! get away! what do you come here to blaspheme for? who wants you?  
174 who asked for you? Go! go, I say! take yourself off? Why don't you go? Keep your  
175 ribaldry for others."

176 "I am as good as you any day," said Juba.

177 "I don't set myself up," answered Agellius, "but it's impossible to confound Christian and  
178 unbeliever as you do." {35}

179 "Christian and unbeliever!" said Juba, slowly. "I suppose, when they are a-courting each  
180 other, they *are* confounded." He looked hard at Agellius, as if he thought he had hit a  
181 blot. Then he continued, "If I *were* a Christian, I'd be so in earnest: else I'd be an honest  
182 heathen."

183 Agellius coloured somewhat, and sat down, as if under embarrassment.

184 "I despise you," said Juba; "you have not the pluck to be a Christian. Be consistent, and  
185 fizz upon a stake; but you're not made of that stuff. You're even afraid of uncle. Nay,  
186 you can be caught by those painted wares, about which, when it suits your purpose, you  
187 can be so grave. I despise you," he continued, "I despise you, and the whole kit of you.  
188 What's the difference between you and another? Your people say, 'Earth's a vanity,  
189 life's a dream, riches a deceit, pleasure a snare. Fratres charissimi, the time is short;'  
190 but who love earth and life and riches and pleasure better than they? You are all of you  
191 as fond of the world, as set upon gain, as chary of reputation, as ambitious of power, as  
192 the jolly old heathen, who, you say, is going the way of the pit."

193 "It is one thing to have a conscience," answered Agellius; "another thing to act upon it.  
194 The conscience of these poor people is darkened. You had a conscience once."

195 "Conscience, conscience," said Juba. "Yes, certainly, once I had a conscience. Yes,  
196 and once I had a bad chill, and went about chattering and {36} shivering; and once I had  
197 a game leg, and then I went limping; and so, you see, I once on a time had a  
198 conscience. O yes, I have had many consciences before now—white, black, yellow, and  
199 green; they were all bad; but they are all gone, and now I have none."

200 Agellius said nothing; his one wish, as may be supposed, was to get rid of so  
201 unwelcome a visitor.

202 "The truth is," continued Juba, with the air of a teacher—"the truth is, that religion was a  
203 fashion with me, which is now gone by. It was the complexion of a particular stage of my  
204 life. I was neither the better nor the worse for it. It was an accident, like the bloom on my  
205 face, which soon," he said, spreading his fingers over his dirty-coloured cheeks, and  
206 stroking them, "which soon will disappear. I acted according to the feeling, while it  
207 lasted; but I can no more recall it than my first teeth, or the down on my chin. It's among  
208 the things that were."

209 Agellius still keeping silence from weariness and disgust, he looked at him in a  
210 significant way, and said, slowly, "I see how it is; I have penetration enough to perceive  
211 that you don't believe a bit more about religion than I do."

212 "You must not say that under my roof," cried Agellius, feeling he must not let his  
213 brother's charge pass without a protest. "Many are my sins, but unbelief is not one of  
214 them."

215 Juba tossed his head. "I think I can see through a stone slab as well as any one," he  
216 said. "It is {37} as I have said; but you're too proud to confess it. It's part of your  
217 hypocrisy."

218 "Well," said Agellius coldly, "let's have done. It's getting late, Juba; you'll be missed at  
219 home. Jucundus will be inquiring for you, and some of those revelling friends of yours

220 may do you a mischief by the way. Why, my good fellow," he continued, in surprise,  
221 "you have no leggings. The scorpions will catch hold of you to a certainty in the dark.  
222 Come, let me tie some straw wisps about you."

223 "No fear of scorpions for me," answered Juba; "I have some real good amulets for the  
224 occasion, which even *boola-kog* and *uffah* will respect."

225 Saying this, he passed out of the room as unceremoniously as he had entered it, and  
226 took the direction of the city, talking to himself, and singing snatches of wild airs as he  
227 went along, throwing back and shaking his head, and now and then uttering a sharp  
228 internal laugh. Disdaining to follow the ordinary path, he dived down into the thick and  
229 wet grass, and scrambled through the ravine, which the public road crossed before it  
230 ascended the hill. Meanwhile he accompanied his quickened pace with a louder strain,  
231 and it ran as follows;—

232 "The little black Moor is the mate for me,  
233 When the night is dark, and the earth is free,  
234 Under the limbs of the broad yew-tree.

235 "Twas Father Cham that planted that yew,  
236 And he fed it fat with the bloody dew  
237 Of a score of brats, as his lineage grew. {38}

238 "Footing and flaunting it, all in the night,  
239 Each lock flings fire, each heel strikes light;  
240 No lamps need they, whose breath is bright."

241 Here he was interrupted by a sudden growl, which sounded almost under his feet, and  
242 some wild animal was seen to slink away. Juba showed no surprise; he had taken out a  
243 small metal idol, and whispering some words to it, had presented it to the animal. He  
244 clambered up the bank, gained the city gate, and made his way for his uncle's dwelling,  
245 which was near the temple of Astarte.

246 Chapter 5. Jucundus at Supper

247 {39} THE house of Jucundus was closed for the night when Juba reached it, or you  
248 would see, were you his companion, that it was one of the most showy shops in Sicca.  
249 It was the image-store of the place, and set out for sale, not articles of statuary alone,  
250 but of metal, of mosaic work, and of jewellery, as far as they were dedicated to the  
251 service of paganism. It was bright with the many colours adopted in the embellishment  
252 of images, and the many lights which silver and gold, brass and ivory, alabaster,  
253 gypsum, talc, and glass reflected. Shelves and cabinets were laden with wares; both the  
254 precious material, and the elaborated trinket. All tastes were suited, the popular and the  
255 refined, the fashion of the day and the love of the antique, the classical and the  
256 barbarian devotion. There you might see the rude symbols of invisible powers, which,  
257 originating in deficiency of art, had been perpetuated by reverence for the past: the

258 mysterious cube of marble sacred among the Arabs, the pillar which was the emblem of  
259 Mercury or Bacchus, the broad-based cone of Heliogabalus, the pyramid of Paphos,  
260 and the tile or brick of Juno. {40}

261 There, too, were the unmeaning blocks of stone with human heads, which were to be  
262 dressed out in rich robes, and to simulate the human form. There were other articles  
263 besides, as portable as these were unmanageable: little Junos, Mercuries, Dianas, and  
264 Fortunas, for the bosom or the girdle. Household gods were there, and the objects of  
265 personal devotion: Minerva or Vesta, with handsome niches or shrines in which they  
266 might reside. There, too, were the brass crowns, or *nimbi*, which were intended to  
267 protect the heads of the gods from bats and birds. There you might buy, were you a  
268 heathen, rings with heads on them of Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Serapis, and above all  
269 Astarte. You would find there the rings and signets of the Basilidians; amulets too of  
270 wood or ivory: figures of demons, preternaturally ugly; little skeletons, and other  
271 superstitious devices. It would be hard, indeed, if you could not be pleased, whatever  
272 your religious denomination—unless indeed you were determined to reject all the  
273 appliances and objects of idolatry indiscriminately—and in that case you would rejoice  
274 that it was night when you arrived there, and, in particular, that darkness swallowed up  
275 other appliances and objects of pagan worship, which to darkness were due by a  
276 particular title, and by darkness were best shrouded, till the coming of that day when all  
277 things, good and evil, shall be made light.

278 The shop, as we have said, was closed, concealed from view by large lumbering  
279 shutters, and made secure by heavy bars of wood. So we must enter by {41} the  
280 passage or vestibule on the right side, and that will conduct us into a modest *atrium*,  
281 with an *impluvium* on one side, and on the other the *triclinium* or supper-room, backing  
282 the shop. Jucundus had been pleasantly engaged in a small supper-party; and, mindful  
283 that a *symposium* should lie within the number of the Graces and of the Muses, he had  
284 confined his guests to two, the young Greek Aristo, who was one of his principal artists,  
285 and Cornelius the son of a freedman of a Roman of distinction, who had lately got a  
286 place in one of the *scrinia* of the proconsular *officium*, and had migrated into the  
287 province from the imperial city where he had spent his best days.

288 The dinner had not been altogether suitable to modern ideas of good living. The grapes  
289 from Tacape, and the dates from the lake Tritonis, the white and black figs, the  
290 nectarines and peaches, and the watermelons, address themselves to the imagination  
291 of an Englishman, as well as of an African of the third century. So also might the liquor  
292 derived from the sap or honey of the Getulian palm, and the sweet wine,  
293 called *melilotus*, made from the poetical fruit found upon the coast of the Syrtis. He  
294 would have been struck, too, with the sweetness of the mutton; but he would have  
295 asked what the sheep's tails were before he tasted them, and found how like marrow  
296 the firm substance ate of which they consisted. He would have felt he ought to admire  
297 the roes of mullets, pressed and dried, from Mauritania; but he would have thought  
298 twice before he tried the lion cutlets, {42} though they had the flavour of veal, and the  
299 additional *goût* of being imperial property, and poached from a preserve. But when he  
300 saw the indigenous dish, the very haggis and cock-a-leekie of Africa, in the shape of—

301 (alas! alas! it *must* be said, with whatever apology for its introduction)—in shape, then,  
302 of a delicate puppy, served up with tomatos, with its head between its fore-paws, we  
303 consider he would have risen from the unholy table, and thought he had fallen upon the  
304 hospitality of some sorceress of the neighbouring forest. However, to that festive board  
305 our Briton was not invited, for he had some previous engagement that evening, either of  
306 painting himself with woad, or of hiding himself to the chin in the fens; so that nothing  
307 occurred to disturb the harmony of the party, and the good humour and easy  
308 conversation which was the effect of such excellent cheer.

309 Cornelius had been present at the Secular Games in the foregoing year, and was full of  
310 them, of Rome, and of himself in connection with it, as became so genuine a cockney of  
311 the imperial period. He was full of the high patriotic thoughts which so solemn a  
312 celebration had kindled within him. "O great Rome!" he said, "thou art first, and there is  
313 no second. In that wonderful pageant which these eyes saw last year was embodied her  
314 majesty, was promised her eternity. We die, she lives. I say, *let* a man die. It's well for  
315 him to take hemlock, or open a vein, after having seen the Secular Games. What was  
316 there to live for? I felt it; life was gone; its best gifts flat and insipid {43} after that great  
317 day. Excellent—Tauromenian, I suppose? We know it in Rome. Fill up my cup. I drink to  
318 the genius of the emperor."

319 He was full of his subject, and soon resumed it. "Fancy the Campus Martius lighted up  
320 from one end to the other. It was the finest thing in the world. A large plain, covered, not  
321 with streets, not with woods, but broken and crossed with superb buildings in the midst  
322 of groves, avenues of trees, and green grass, down to the water's edge. There's nothing  
323 that isn't there. Do you want the grandest temples in the world, the most spacious  
324 porticoes, the longest race-courses? there they are. Do you want *gymnasia*? there they  
325 are. Do you want arches, statues, obelisks? you find them there. There you have at one  
326 end the stupendous mausoleum of Augustus, cased with white marble, and just across  
327 the river the huge towering mound of Hadrian. At the other end you have the noble  
328 Pantheon of Agrippa, with its splendid Syracusan columns, and its dome glittering with  
329 silver tiles. Hard by are the baths of Alexander, with their beautiful groves. Ah! my good  
330 friend! I shall have no time to drink if I go on. Beyond are the numerous chapels and  
331 fanes which fringe the base of the Capitoline hill; the tall column of Antoninus comes  
332 next, with its adjacent basilica, where is kept the authentic list of the provinces of the  
333 empire, and of the governors, each a king in power and dominion, who are sent out to  
334 them. Well, I am now only beginning. Fancy, I say, this magnificent region all {44}  
335 lighted up; every temple to and fro, every bath, every grove, gleaming with innumerable  
336 lamps and torches. No, not even the gods of Olympus have anything that comes near it.  
337 Rome is the greatest of all divinities. In the dead of night all was alive; then it was, when  
338 nature sleeps exhausted, Rome began the solemn sacrifices to commemorate her  
339 thousand years. On the banks of the Tiber, which had seen Æneas land, and Romulus  
340 ascend to the gods, the clear red flame shot up as the victims burned. The music of ten  
341 thousand horns and flutes burst forth, and the sacred dances began upon the  
342 greensward. I am too old to dance; but, I protest, even I stood up and threw off. We  
343 danced through three nights, dancing the old millenary out, dancing the new millenary

344 in. We were all Romans, no strangers, no slaves. It was a solemn family feast, the feast  
345 of all the Romans."

346 "Then we came in for the feast," said Aristo; "for Caracalla gave Roman citizenship to all  
347 freemen all over the world. We are all of us Romans, recollect, Cornelius."

348 "Ah! that was another matter—a condescension," answered Cornelius. "Yes, in a certain  
349 sense, I grant it; but it was a political act."

350 "I warrant you," retorted Aristo, "most political. We were to be fleeced, do you see? so  
351 your imperial government made us Romans, that we might have the taxes of Romans,  
352 and that in addition to our own. You've taxed us double; and as for the privilege of {45}  
353 citizenship, much it is, by Hercules, when every snob has it who can wear a *pileus* or  
354 cherish his hair."

355 "Ah! but you should have seen the procession from the Capitol," continued Cornelius,  
356 "on, I think, the second day; from the Capitol to the Circus, all down the Via Sacra.  
357 Hosts of strangers there, and provincials from the four corners of the earth, but not in  
358 the procession. There you saw, all in one *coup-d'œil*, the real good blood of Rome, the  
359 young blood of the new generation, and promise of the future; the sons of patrician and  
360 consular families, of imperators, orators, conquerors, statesmen. They rode at the head  
361 of the procession, fine young fellows, six abreast; and still more of them on foot. Then  
362 came the running horses and the chariots, the boxers, the wrestlers, and other  
363 combatants, all ready for the competition. The whole school of gladiators then turned  
364 out, boys and all, with their masters, dressed in red tunics, and splendidly armed. They  
365 formed three bands, and they went forward gaily, dancing and singing the Pyrrhic. By-  
366 the-bye, a thousand pair of gladiators fought during the games—a round thousand, and  
367 such clean-made, well-built fellows, and they came against each other so gallantly! You  
368 should have seen it; *I* can't go through it. There was a lot of satyrs, jumping and frisking,  
369 in burlesque of the martial dances which preceded them. There was a crowd of  
370 trumpeters and horn-blowers; ministers of the sacrifices with their victims, bulls and  
371 rams, dressed up with gay wreaths; drivers, butchers, haruspices, {46} heralds; images  
372 of gods with their cars of ivory or silver, drawn by tame lions and elephants. I can't  
373 recollect the order. O! but the grandest thing of all was the Carmen, sung by twenty-  
374 seven noble youths, and as many noble maidens, taken for the purpose from the  
375 bosoms of their families to propitiate the gods of Rome. The flamens, augurs, colleges  
376 of priests, it was endless. Last of all came the emperor himself."

377 "That's the late man," observed Jucundus, "Philip; no bad riddance his death, if all's true  
378 that's said of him."

379 "All emperors are good in their time and way," answered Cornelius; "Philip was good  
380 then, and Decius is good now;—whom the gods preserve!"

381 "True," said Aristo, "I understand; an emperor cannot do wrong, except in dying, and  
382 then everything goes wrong with him. His death is his first bad deed; he ought to be  
383 ashamed of it; it somehow turns all his great virtues into vices."

384 "Ah! no one was so good an emperor as our man, Gordianus," said Jucundus, "a  
385 princely old man, living and dead; patron of trade and of the arts; such villas! he had  
386 enormous revenues. Poor old gentleman! and his son too. I never shall forget the day  
387 when the news came that he was gone. Let me see, it was shortly after that old fool  
388 Strabo's death—I mean my brother; a good thirteen years ago. All Africa was in tears;  
389 there was no one like Gordianus." {47}

390 "That's old world philosophy," said Aristo; "Jucundus, you must go to school. Don't you  
391 see that all that is, is right; and all that was, is wrong? 'Te nos facimus, Fortuna, deam,'  
392 says your poet; well, I drink 'to the fortunes of Rome,'—while it lasts."

393 "You're a young man," answered Cornelius, "a very young man, and a Greek. Greeks  
394 never understand Rome. It's most difficult to understand us. It's a science. Look at this  
395 medal, young gentleman; it was one of those struck at the games. Is it not grand?  
396 'Novum sæculum,' and on the reverse, 'Æternitati.' Always changing, always  
397 imperishable. Emperors rise and fall; Rome remains. The eternal city! Isn't this good  
398 philosophy?"

399 "Truly, a most beautiful medal," said Aristo, examining it, and handing it on to his host.  
400 "You might make an amulet of it, Jucundus. But as to eternity, why, that is a very great  
401 word; and, if I mistake not, other states have been eternal before Rome. Ten centuries  
402 is a very respectable eternity; be content, Rome is eternal already, and may die without  
403 prejudice to the medal."

404 "Blaspheme not," replied Cornelius: "Rome is healthier, more full of life, and promises  
405 more, than at any former time, you may rely upon it. 'Novum sæculum!' she has the age  
406 of the eagle, and will but cast her feathers to begin a fresh thousand."

407 "But Egypt," interposed Aristo, "if old Herodotus speaks true, scarcely had a beginning.  
408 Up and up, {48} the higher you go, the more dynasties of Egyptian kings do you find.  
409 And we hear strange reports of the nations in the far east, beyond the Ganges."

410 "But I tell you, man," rejoined Cornelius, "Rome is a city of kings. That one city, in this  
411 one year, has as many kings at once as those of all the kings of all the dynasties of  
412 Egypt put together. Sesostris, and the rest of them, what are they to imperators,  
413 prefects, proconsuls, *vicarii*, and *rationales*? Look back at Lucullus, Cæsar, Pompey,  
414 Sylla, Titus, Trajan. What's old Cheops' pyramid to the Flavian amphitheatre? What is  
415 the many-gated Thebes to Nero's golden house, while it was? What the grandest palace  
416 of Sesostris or Ptolemy but a second-rate villa of any one of ten thousand Roman  
417 citizens? Our houses stand on acres of ground, they ascend as high as the Tower of  
418 Babylon; they swarm with columns like a forest; they pullulate into statues and pictures.  
419 The walls, pavements, and ceilings are dazzling from the lustre of the rarest marble, red

420 and yellow, green and mottled. Fountains of perfumed water shoot aloft from the floor,  
421 and fish swim in rocky channels round about the room, waiting to be caught and killed  
422 for the banquet. We dine; and we feast on the head of the ostrich, the brains of the  
423 peacock, the liver of the bream, the milk of the murena, and the tongue of the flamingo.  
424 A flight of doves, nightingales, beccaficoes are concentrated into one dish. On great  
425 occasions we eat a phœnix. Our saucepans are of silver, our dishes of gold, our vases  
426 of onyx, and our cups of {49} precious stones. Hangings and carpets of Tyrian purple  
427 are around us and beneath us, and we lie on ivory couches. The choicest wines of  
428 Greece and Italy crown our goblets, and exotic flowers crown our heads. In come troops  
429 of dancers from Lydia, or pantomimes from Alexandria, to entertain both eye and mind;  
430 or our noble dames and maidens take a place at our tables; they wash in asses' milk,  
431 they dress by mirrors as large as fish-ponds, and they glitter from head to foot with  
432 combs, brooches, necklaces, collars, ear-rings, armlets, bracelets, finger-rings, girdles,  
433 stomachers, and anklets, all of diamond and emerald. Our slaves may be counted by  
434 thousands, and they come from all parts of the world. Everything rare and precious is  
435 brought to Rome: the gum of Arabia, the nard of Assyria, the papyrus of Egypt, the  
436 citron-wood of Mauretania, the bronze of Ægina, the pearls of Britain, the cloth of gold  
437 of Phrygia, the fine webs of Cos, the embroidery of Babylon, the silks of Persia, the lion-  
438 skins of Getulia, the wool of Miletus, the plaids of Gaul. Thus we live, an imperial  
439 people, who do nothing but enjoy themselves and keep festival the whole year; and at  
440 length we die—and then we burn: we burn—in stacks of cinnamon and cassia, and in  
441 shrouds of *asbestos*, making emphatically a good end of it. Such are we Romans, a  
442 great people. Why, we are honoured wherever we go. There's my master, there's  
443 myself; as we came here from Italy, I protest we were nearly worshipped as demi-gods."  
444 {50}

445 "And perhaps some fine morning," said Aristo, "Rome herself will burn in cinnamon and  
446 cassia, and in all her burnished Corinthian brass and scarlet bravery, the old mother  
447 following her children to the funeral pyre. One has heard something of Babylon, and its  
448 drained moat, and the soldiers of the Persian."

449 A pause occurred in the conversation as one of Jucundus's slaves entered with fresh  
450 wine, larger goblets, and a vase of snow from the Atlas.