

Chapter 12. A Death

1 {135} THE first stages of repentance are but a fever, which there is restlessness and
2 thirst, hot and cold fits, vague, dreary dreams, long darkness which seems destined
3 never to have a morning, effort without result, and collapse without reaction. These
4 symptoms had already manifested themselves in Agellius; he spoke calmly to Callista,
5 and sustained himself by the claims of the moment; but no sooner had he left the room
6 and was thrown upon himself, than his self-possession left him, and he fell into an
7 agony, or rather anarchy of tumultuous feelings. Then rose up before his mind a
8 hundred evil spectres, not less scaring and more real than the dreams of the delirious.
9 He thought of the singular favour which had been shown him in his reception into the
10 Christian fold, and that at so early a date; of the myriads all around who continued in
11 heathenism as they had been born, and of his utter insensibility to his own privilege. He
12 felt how much would be required of him, and how little hitherto had been forthcoming.
13 He thought of the parable of the barren fig-tree, and the question was whispered in his
14 {136} ear whether it would not be fulfilled in him. He asked himself in what his heart and
15 his conduct differed from the condition of a fairly virtuous heathen. And then he thought
16 of Callista in contrast with himself, as having done more with the mite which she
17 possessed than he had done with many pounds. He felt that Tyre and Sidon were rising
18 up against him in her person; or rather how the saying seemed about to be verified in
19 her, that strangers should sit down in the kingdom from far countries, while those who
20 were the heirs should be thrust out. He had been rebuked by one to whom he rather
21 ought to have brought self-knowledge and compunction, and she was sensitively alive
22 to his want of charity. She had felt bitterly that she was left in ignorance and sin by one
23 who had what she had not. She had accused him of being zealous enough to win her to
24 himself, when he had shown no zeal at all to win her to her Maker. If she was brought to
25 the truth at length, there would be no thanks to him for the happy change; yet on the
26 other hand, though he had predicted it, alas! was it likely that it would be granted? Had
27 she not had her opportunity, which was lost because he had not improved it? Yes, she
28 had with a deliberate mind and in set words put aside and taken leave of that which she
29 once desired and hoped might have been her own, sorrowfully indeed, but peremptorily,
30 as firmly persisting in rejecting it, as she might have persisted in maintaining it; and, if
31 she died in infidelity, horrible thought! would not the burden lie on him, {137} and was
32 this to be the token of the love which he pretended to entertain for her?

33 What was he living for? what was the work he had set himself to do! Did he live to plant
34 flowers, or to rear fruit, to maintain himself and to make money? Was that a time to
35 pride himself on vineyards and olive-yards, when, like Eliseus, he was one among
36 myriads who were in unbelief? Ah, the difference between a saint and him? Of what
37 good was he on earth; why should not he die? why so chary of his life? why preserve
38 his wretched life at all? Could he not do more by giving it than by keeping it? Might it not
39 have been given him perchance for the very purpose that he might sacrifice it for Him
40 who had given it? He had been timid about making a profession of his faith, which might
41 have led to prison and death; but perhaps the very object of his life in the divine
42 purpose, the very reason of his birth, had been that, as soon as he was grown, he
43 should die for the truth. He might have been cut off by disease; he was not; and why,

44 except that he might merit in his death, and that what, in the ordinary course of things,
45 was a mere suffering, might in his case be an act of service? His death might have been
46 the conversion of thousands, of Callista; and the fewness of his days here would have
47 been his claim to a blessed eternity hereafter.

48 Nor Callista alone; he had natural friends, with nearer claims upon his charity. Had he
49 been other than he was, he might have prevailed with his uncle; {138} at least he might
50 have taught him to respect the Christian Faith and Name, and restrained him from
51 daring to attempt, for he now saw that it was an attempt, to seduce him into sin. He
52 might have lodged a good seed in his heart, which in the hour of sickness might have
53 germinated. And his brother again had learned to despise him; indeed he had raised in
54 every one who came near him the suspicion that he was not really a Christian, that he
55 was an apostate (he could not help uttering a cry of anguish as he used the word), an
56 apostate from that which was his real life and supreme worship.

57 Why did he not at once go into the Basilica or the Gymnasium, and proclaim himself a
58 Christian? There were rumours abroad that the new emperor was beginning a new
59 policy towards his religion; let him inaugurate it in Agellius. Might he not thus perchance
60 wash out his sin? He would be led into the amphitheatre, as his betters had been led
61 before him; the crowds would yell, and the lion would be let loose upon him. He would
62 confront the edict, tear it down, be seized by the apparitor, and hurried to the rack or the
63 slow fire. Callista would hear of it, and would learn at length he was not quite the craven
64 and the recreant which she thought him.

65 Then his thoughts took a turn. Callista! what was Callista to him? Why should he think
66 of her, when she was girding him to martyrdom? Was she to be the motive which was to
67 animate him, and her praise his reward? Alas, alas! could he gain heaven by {139}
68 pleasing a heathen? "But to whom then," he continued, "am I to look up? who is to give
69 me sympathy? who is to encourage, to advise me? O my Father, pity me! a feeble child,
70 a poor, outcast, wandering sheep, away from the fold, torn by the briars and thorns, and
71 no one to bind his wounds and retrace his steps for him. Why am I thus alone in the
72 world? why am I without a pastor and guide? Ah, was not this my fault in remaining in
73 Sicca? I have no tie here; let me go to Carthage, or to Tagaste, or to Madaura, or to
74 Hippo. I am not fit to walk the world by myself; I am too simple, and am no match for its
75 artifices."

76 Here another thought took possession of him, which had as yet but crossed his mind,
77 and it made him colour up with confusion and terror. "They were laying a plot for me,"
78 he said, "my uncle and Aristo; and it is Callista who has defeated it." And as he spoke,
79 he felt how much he owed to her, and how dangerous too it was to think of his debt. Yet
80 it would not be wrong to pray for her; she had marred the device of which she was to
81 have been the agent. "Laqueus contritus est, et nos liberati sumus:" the net was broken
82 and he was delivered. She had refused his devotion, that he might give it to his God;
83 and now he would only think of her, and whisper her name, when he was kneeling
84 before the Blessed Mary, his advocate. O that that second and better Eve, who brought

85 salvation into the world, as our first mother brought death, O that she might {140} bear
86 Callista's name in remembrance, and get it written in the Book of life!

87 It was high noon; and all this time Agellius was walking in his present excited mood,
88 without covering to his head, under the burning rays of the sun, not knowing which way
89 he went, and retracing his steps, as he wandered about at random, with a vague notion
90 he was going homewards. The few persons whom he met, creeping about under the
91 shadow of the lofty houses, or under the porticoes of the temples, looked at him with
92 wonder, and thought him furious or deranged. The shafts of the sun were not so hot as
93 his own thoughts, or as the blood which shot to and fro so fiercely in his veins; but they
94 were working fearfully on his physical frame, though they could not increase the fever of
95 his mind. He had come to the Forum; the market people were crouching under their
96 booths or the shelter of their baskets. The riffraff of the city, who lived by their wits, or by
97 odd jobs, or on the windfalls of the market; lazy fellows who did nothing, who did not
98 move till hunger urged them, like the brute; half-idiotic chewers of opium, ragged or
99 rather naked children, the butcher boys and scavengers of the temples, lay at their
100 length at the mouth of the caverns formed by the precipitous rock, or under the Arch of
101 Triumph, or amid the columns of the Gymnasium and the Heracleum, or in the
102 doorways of the shops. A scattering of beggars were lying, poor creatures, on their
103 backs in the blazing sun, reckless of the awful maladies, the fits, the {141} seizures, and
104 the sudden death, which might be the consequence.

105 Numbers out of this mixed multitude were asleep; some were looking with dull listless
106 eyes at the still scene, or at any accidental movements which might vary it. They saw a
107 figure coming nearer and nearer and wildly passing by. Just then Agellius was diverted
108 from his painful meditations by hearing one of these fellows say to another, as he
109 roused from a sort of doze, "That's one of them. We know them all, but very poor
110 pickings can be got out of them; but he has more than most. They're a low set in Sicca."
111 And then the man cried out, "Look sharp, young chap! the Furies are at your heels, and
112 the Fates are going before you. Look there at the emperor; he is looking at you, as grim
113 and sour as you could wish him." He spoke of the equestrian statue of Severus before
114 the Basilica on the right; and, attracted by his words, Agellius went up to a board which
115 was fixed to its base. It was an imperial edict, and it ran as follows:—

116 "Cneius Trajanus Decius, Augustus; and Quintus Herennius Etruscus Decius, Cæsar;
117 Emperors, unconquerable and pious; by united council these:—

118 "Whereas we have experienced the benefits and the gifts of the gods, and do also enjoy
119 the victory which they have given us over our enemies, and moreover salubrity of
120 seasons, and abundance in the fruits of the earth;

121 "Therefore, acknowledging the aforesaid as our {142} benefactors and the providers of
122 those things which are necessary for the commonwealth, we make this our decree, that
123 every class of the state, freemen and slaves, the army and civilians, offer to the gods
124 expiatory sacrifices, falling down in supplication before them;

125 "And if any one shall presume to disobey this our divine command, which we unite in
126 promulgating, we order that man to be thrown into chains, and to be subjected to
127 various tortures;

128 "And should he thereupon be persuaded to reverse his disobedience, he shall receive
129 from us no slight honours;

130 "But should he hold out in opposition, first he shall have many tortures, and then shall
131 be executed by the sword, or thrown into the deep sea, or given as a prey to birds and
132 dogs;

133 "And more than all if such a person be a professor of the Christian religion.

134 "Farewell, and live happy."

135 The old man in the fable called on Death, and Death made his appearance. We are very
136 far indeed from meaning that Agellius uttered random words, or spoke impatiently, when
137 he just now expressed a wish to have the opportunity of dying for the Faith.
138 Nevertheless, what now met his eyes and was transmitted through them, sentence by
139 sentence, into his mind, was not certainly of a nature to calm the tumult which was busy
140 in breast and brain; a sickness came over him, and he staggered away. The words of
141 the edict {143} still met his eyes, and were of a bright red colour. The sun was right
142 before him, but the letters were in the sun, and the sun in his brain. He reeled and fell
143 heavily on the pavement. No notice was taken of the occurrence by the spectators
144 around him. They lazily or curiously looked on, and waited to see if he would recover.

145 How long he lay there he could not tell, when he came to himself; if it could really be
146 said to be coming to himself to have the power of motion, and an instinct that he must
147 move, and move in one direction. He managed to rise and lean against the pedestal of
148 the statue, and its shade by this time protected him. Then an intense desire came upon
149 him to get home, and that desire gave him a temporary preternatural strength. It came
150 upon him as a duty to leave Sicca for his cottage, and he set off. He had a confused
151 notion that he must do his duty, and go straight forward, and turn neither to the right, nor
152 the left, and stop nowhere, but move on steadily for his true home. But next an
153 impression came upon him that he was running away from persecution, and that this
154 ought not to be, and that he ought to face the enemy, or at least not to hide from him,
155 but meekly wait for him.

156 As he went along the narrow streets which led down the hill towards the city gate this
157 thought came so powerfully upon him that at length he sat down on a stone which
158 projected from an open shop, and thought of surrendering himself. He felt the benefit of
159 the {144} rest, and this he fancied to be the calm of conscience consequent upon self-
160 surrender and resignation. It was a fruiterer's stall, and the owner, seeing his
161 exhaustion, offered him some slices of a watermelon for his refreshment. He ate one of
162 them, and then again a vague feeling came on him that he was in danger of idolatry,
163 and must protest against idolatry, and that he ought not to remain in the neighbourhood

164 of temptation. So, throwing down the small coin which was sufficient for payment, he
165 continued his journey. The rest and the refreshment of the fruit, and the continued
166 shade which the narrow street allowed him, allayed the fever, and for the time recruited
167 him, and he moved on languidly. The sun, however, was still high in heaven, and when
168 he got beyond the city beat down upon his head from a cloudless sky. He painfully
169 toiled up the ascent which led to his cottage. He had nearly gained the gate of his
170 homestead; he saw his old household slave, born in his father's house, a Christian like
171 himself, coming to meet him. A dizziness came over him, he lost his senses, and fell
172 down helplessly upon the bank.

Chapter 13. And Resurrection

173 {145} JUCUNDUS was quite as much amused as provoked at the result of the delicate
174 negotiation in which he had entangled his nephew. It was a gratification to him to find
175 that its ill success had been owing in no respect to any fault on the side of Agellius. He
176 had done his part without shrinking, and the view which he, Jucundus, had taken of his
177 state of mind, was satisfactorily confirmed. He had nothing to fear from Agellius, and
178 though he had failed in securing the guarantee which he had hoped for his attachment
179 to things as they were, yet in the process of failure it had been proved that his nephew
180 might be trusted without it. And it was a question, whether a girl so full of whims and
181 caprices as Callista might after all have done him any permanent good. The absurd
182 notion, indeed, of her having a leaning for Christianity had been refuted by her conduct
183 on the occasion; still, who could rely on a clever and accomplished Greek? There were
184 secret societies and conspiracies in abundance, and she might have involved so weak
185 and innocent a fellow in some plans against the government, now or at a future time; or
186 might have {146} alienated him from his uncle, or in some way or other made a fool of
187 him, if she had consented to have him for her slave. Why she had rejected so eligible a
188 suitor it was now useless and idle to inquire; it might be that the haughty or greedy
189 Greek had required him to bid higher for her favourable notice. If the negotiation had
190 taken such a turn, then indeed there was still more gratifying evidence of Agellius
191 having broken from his fantastic and peevish superstition.

192 Still, however, he was not without anxiety, now that the severe measures directed
193 against the Christians were in progress. No overt act, indeed, beyond the publication of
194 the edict, had been taken in Sicca—probably would be taken at all. The worst was, that
195 something must be done to make a show; he could have wished that some of the
196 multitude of townspeople, half suspected of Christianity, had stood firm, and suffered
197 themselves to be tortured and executed. One or two would have been enough; but the
198 magistracy got no credit with the central government for zeal and activity if no Christians
199 were made an example of. Yet still it was a question whether the strong acts at
200 Carthage and elsewhere would not suffice, though the lesser towns did nothing. At
201 least, while the populace was quiet, there was nothing to press for severity. There were
202 no rich Christians in Sicca to tempt the cupidity of the informer or of the magistrate; no
203 political partisans among them, who had made enemies with this or that class of the
204 community. {147} But, supposing a bad feeling to rise in the populace, supposing the
205 magistrates to have ill-wishers and rivals—and what men in power had not?—who

206 might be glad to catch them tripping, and make a case against them at Rome, why, it
207 must be confessed that Agellius was nearly the only victim who could be pitched upon.
208 He wished Callista no harm, but, if a Christian must be found and held up *in terrorem*,
209 he would rather it was a person like her, without connections and home, than the
210 member of any decent family of Sicca, whose fair fame would be compromised by a
211 catastrophe. However, she was *not* a Christian, and Agellius *was*, at least by
212 profession; and his fear was lest Juba should be right in his estimate of his brother's
213 character. Juba had said that Agellius could be as obstinate as he was ordinarily
214 indolent and yielding, and Jucundus dreaded lest, if he were rudely charged with
215 Christianity, and bidden to renounce it under pain of punishment, he would rebel against
216 the tyrannical order, and go to prison and to death out of sheer perverseness or sense
217 of honour.

218 With these perplexities before him, he could find nothing better than the following plan
219 of action, which had been in his mind for some time. While the edict remained
220 inoperative, he would do nothing at all, and let Agellius go on with his country
221 occupations, which would keep him out of the way. But if any disposition appeared of a
222 popular commotion, or a movement on the part of the magistracy, he determined to get
223 possession {148} of Agellius, and forcibly confine him in his own house in Sicca. He
224 hoped that in the case of one so young, so uncommitted, he should have influence with
225 the municipal authorities, or at the *prætorium*, or in the camp (for the camp and the
226 *prætorium* were under different jurisdictions in the proconsulate), to shelter Agellius
227 from a public inquiry into his religious tenets, or if this could not be, to smuggle him out
228 of the city. He was ready to affirm solemnly that his nephew was no Christian, though
229 he was touched in the head, and, from an affection parallel to hydrophobia, to which the
230 disciples of Galen ought to turn their attention, was sent into convulsions on the sight of
231 an altar. His father, indeed, was a malignant old atheist—there was no harm in being
232 angry with the dead—but it was very hard the son should suffer for his father's offence.
233 If he must be judged of by his parents, let him rather have the advantage of the
234 thorough loyalty and religiousness of his mother, a most zealous old lady, in high repute
235 in the neighbourhood of Sicca for her theurgic knowledge, a staunch friend of the
236 imperial government, which had before now been indebted to her for important
237 information, and as staunch a hater of the Christians. Such was the plan of proceedings
238 resolved on by Jucundus before he received the news of his nephew's serious malady.
239 It did not reach him till many days after; and then he did not go to see him, first, lest he
240 should be supposed to be in communication with him, next, as having no respect for
241 that romantic sort of generosity {149} which risks the chances of contagion for the
242 absurd ceremony of paying a compliment.

243 It was thus that Jucundus addressed himself to the present state of affairs, and
244 anticipated the chances of the future. As to Aristo, he had very little personal interest in
245 the matter. His sister might have thwarted him in affairs which lay nearer his heart than
246 the moral emancipation of Agellius; and as she generally complied with his suggestions
247 and wishes, whatever they were, he did not grudge her her liberty of action in this
248 instance. Nor had the occurrence which had taken place any great visible effect upon
249 Callista herself. She had lost her right to be indignant with her brother, and she resigned

250 or rather abandoned herself to her destiny. Her better feelings had been brought out for
251 the moment in her conversation with Agellius; but they were not ordinary ones. True,
252 she was tired, but she was the slave of the world; and Agellius had only made her more
253 sceptical than before that there was any service better. So at least she said to herself;
254 she said it was fantastic to go elsewhere for good, and that, if life was short, then, as
255 her brother said, it was necessary to make the most of it.

256 And meanwhile, what of Agellius himself? Why, it will be some little time before Agellius
257 will be in a condition to moralize upon anything. His faithful slave half-carried, half-drew
258 him into the cottage, and stretched him upon his bed. Then, having sufficient skill for the
259 ordinary illnesses of the country, {150} though this was more than an ordinary fever, he
260 drew blood from him, gave him a draught of herbs, and left him to the slow but safe
261 processes of nature to restore him. It could not be affirmed that he was not in
262 considerable danger of life, yet youth carries hope with it, and his attendant had little to
263 fear for his recovery. For some days certainly Agellius had no apprehension of anything,
264 except of restlessness and distress, of sleepless nights, or dreary, miserable dreams. At
265 length one morning, as he was lying on his back with his eyes shut, it came into his
266 mind to ask himself whether Sunday would ever come. He had been accustomed upon
267 the first day of the week to say some particular prayers and psalms, and unite himself in
268 spirit with his brethren beyond seas. And then he tried to remember the last Sunday;
269 and the more he thought, the less he could remember it, till he began to think that
270 months had gone without a Sunday. This he was certain of, that he had lost reckoning,
271 for he had made no notches for the days for a long while past, and unless his slave
272 Asper knew, there was no one to tell him. Here he got so puzzled, that it was like one of
273 the bad dreams which had worried him. He felt it affect his head, and he was obliged to
274 give up the inquiry.

275 From this time his sleep was better and more refreshing for several days; he was more
276 collected when he was awake, and was able to ask himself why he lay there, and what
277 had happened to him. Then gradually his memory began to return like the dawning
278 {151} of the day; the cause and the circumstances of his recent visit to the city, point
279 after point came up, and he felt first wonder, and then certainty. He recollected the
280 Forum, and then the edict; a solemn, overpowering emotion here seized him, and for a
281 while he dared not think more. When he recovered, and tried to pursue the events of the
282 day, he found himself unequal to the task; all was dark, except that he had some vague
283 remembrance of thirsting, and some one giving him to drink, and then his saying with
284 the Psalmist, "Transivimus per ignem et aquam."

285 He opened his eyes and looked about him. He was at home. There was some one at
286 the bed-head whom he could not see hanging over him, and he was too weak to raise
287 himself and so command a view of him. He waited patiently, being too feeble to have
288 any great anxiety on the subject. Presently a voice addressed him: "You are recovering,
289 my son," it said.

290 "Who are *you*?" said Agellius abruptly. The person spoken to applied his mouth to
291 Agellius's ear, and uttered lowly several sacred names.

292 Agellius would have started up had he been strong enough; he could but sink down
293 upon his rushes in agitation.

294 "Be content to know no more at present," said the stranger, "praise God, as I do. You
295 know enough for your present strength. It is your act of obedience for the day." {152}

296 It was a deep, clear, peaceful, authoritative voice. In his present state, as we have said,
297 it cost Agellius no great effort to mortify curiosity; and the accents of that voice soothed
298 him, and the mystery employed his mind, and had something pleasing and attractive in
299 it. Moreover, about the main point there was no mystery, and could be no mistake, that
300 he was in the hands of a Christian ecclesiastic.

301 The stranger occupied himself for a time with a book of prayers which he carried about
302 him, and then again with the duties of a sick-bed. He sprinkled vinegar over Agellius's
303 face and about the room, and supplied him with the refreshment of cooling fruit. He kept
304 the flies from tormenting him, and did his best so to arrange his posture that he might
305 suffer least from his long lying. In the morning and evening he let in the air, and he
306 excluded the sultry noon. In these various occupations he was from time to time
307 removed to a distance from the patient, who thus had an opportunity of observing him.
308 The stranger was of middle height, upright, and well proportioned; he was dressed in a
309 peasant's or slave's dark tunic. His face was rather round than long; his hair black, yet
310 with the promise of greyness, with what might be baldness in the crown, or a priest's
311 tonsure. His short beard curled round his chin; his complexion was very clear. But the
312 most striking point about him was his eyes; they were of a light or greyish blue,
313 transparent, and shining like precious stones.

314 From the day that they first interchanged words, {153} the priest said some short
315 prayers from time to time with Agellius—the Lord's Prayer, and portions of the Psalms.
316 Afterwards, when he was well enough to converse, Agellius was struck with the
317 inexpressible peculiarity of his manner. It was self-collected, serene, gentle, tender,
318 unobtrusive, unstudied. It enabled him to say things severe and even stern, without
319 startling, offending, or repelling the hearer. He spoke very little about himself, though
320 from time to time points of detail were elicited of his history in the course of
321 conversation. He said that his name was Cæcilius. Asper, when he entered the room,
322 would kneel down and offer to kiss the stranger's sandal, though the latter generally
323 managed to prevent it.

324 Cæcilius did not speak much about himself; but Agellius, on the other hand, found it a
325 relief to tell out his own history, and reflect upon and describe his own feelings. As he
326 lay on his bed, he half soliloquized, half addressed himself to the stranger. Sometimes
327 he required an answer; sometimes he seemed to require none. Once he asked
328 suddenly, after a long silence, whether a man could be baptized twice; and when the
329 priest answered distinctly in the negative, Agellius replied that if so, he thought it would
330 be best never to be baptized till the hour of death. It was a question, he said, which had
331 perplexed him a good deal, but he never had had any one to converse with on the
332 subject.

333 Cæcilius answered, "But how could you promise yourself that you would be able to
334 obtain the sacrament {154} at the last moment? The water and the administrator might
335 come just too late; and then where would you be, my son? And then again, how do you
336 know you would wish it? Is your will simply in your own power? 'Carpe diem;' take God's
337 gift while you can."

338 "The benefit is so immense," answered Agellius, "that one would wish, if one could, to
339 enter into the unseen world without losing its fulness. This cannot be, if a long time
340 elapses between baptism and death."

341 "You are, then, of the number of those," said Cæcilius, "who would cheat their Maker of
342 His claim on their life, provided they could (as it is said) in their last moment cheat the
343 devil."

344 Agellius continuing silent, Cæcilius added, "You want to enjoy this world, and to inherit
345 the next; is it so?"

346 "I am puzzled, my head is weak, father; I do not see my way to speak." Presently he
347 said, "Sin after baptism is so awful a matter; there is no second laver for sin; and then
348 again, to sin against baptism is so great a sin."

349 The priest said, "In baptism God becomes your Father; your own God; your worship;
350 your love—can you give up this great gift all through your life? Would you live 'without
351 God in this world'?"

352 Tears came into Agellius's eyes, and his throat became oppressed. At last he said,
353 distinctly and tenderly, "No." {155}

354 After a while the priest said, "I suppose what you fear is the fire of judgment, and the
355 prison; not lest you should fall away and be lost."

356 "I know, my dear father," answered the sick youth, "that I have no right to reckon on
357 anything, or promise myself anything; yet somehow I have never feared hell—though I
358 ought, I know I ought; but I have not. I deserve the worst, but somehow I have thought
359 that God would lead me on. He ever has done so."

360 "Then you fear the fire of judgment," said Cæcilius; "you'd put off baptism for fear of that
361 fire."

362 "I did not say I *would*," answered Agellius; "I wanted *you* to explain the thing to me."

363 "Which would you rather, Agellius, be without God here, or suffer the fire there?"

364 Agellius smiled; he said faintly, "I take Him for my portion here *and* there: *He* will be in
365 the fire with me."

366 Agellius lay quiet for some hours, and seemed asleep. Suddenly he began again, "I was
367 baptized when I was only six years old. I'm glad you do not think it was wilful in me, and
368 wrong. I cannot tell what took me," he presently continued. "It was a fervour; I have had
369 nothing of the kind since. What does our Lord say? I can't remember: 'Novissima pejora
370 prioribus."

371 He continued the train of thought another day, or rather the course of his argument; for
372 on the thought itself his mind seemed ever to be working. "My {156} spring is gone," he
373 said, "and I have no summer. Nay, I have had no spring; it was a day, not a season. It
374 came, and it went; where am I now? Can spring ever return? I wish to begin again in
375 right earnest."

376 "Thank God, my son, for this great mercy," said Cæcilius, "that, though you have
377 relaxed, you have never severed yourself from the peace of the Church, you have not
378 denied your God."

379 Agellius sighed bitterly. "O my father," he said, "'Erravi, sicut ovis quæ periit.' I have
380 been very near denying Him, at least by outward act. You do not know me; you cannot
381 know what has come on me lately. And I dare not look back on it, my heart is so weak.
382 My father, how am I to repent of what is past, when I dare not think of it? To think of it is
383 to renew the sin."

384 "'Puer meus, noli timere,'" answered the priest; "'si transieris per ignem, odor ejus non
385 erit in te.' In penance, the grace of God carries you without harm through thoughts and
386 words which *would* harm you apart from it."

387 "Ah, penance!" said Agellius; "I recollect the catechism. What is it, father? a new grace,
388 I know; a plank after baptism. May I have it?"

389 "You are not strong enough yet to think of these things, Agellius," answered Cæcilius.
390 "Please God, you shall get well. Then you shall review all your life, and bring it out in
391 order before Him; and He, through me, will wipe away all that has been amiss. Praise
392 Him who has spared you for this." {157}

393 It was too much for the patient, in his weak state; he could but shed happy tears.

394 Another day he had sat up in bed. He looked at his hands, from which the skin was
395 peeling; he felt his lips, and it was with them the same; and his hair seemed coming off
396 also. He smiled and said, "Renovabitur, ut aquila, juvenus mea."

397 Cæcilius responded, as before, with sacred words which were new to Agellius: "'Qui
398 sperant in Domino mutabunt fortitudinem; assument pennas, sicut aquilæ.' 'Sursum
399 corda!' you must soar, Agellius."

400 "'Sursum corda!'" answered he; "I know those words. They are old friends; where have I
401 heard them? I can't recollect; but they are in my earliest memories. Ah! but, my father,

402 my heart is below, not above. I want to tell you all. I want to tell you about one who has
403 enthralled my heart; who has divided it with my True Love. But I daren't speak of her, as
404 I have said; I dare not speak, lest I be carried away. O, I blush to say it; she is a
405 heathen! May God save her soul! Will He come to me, and not to her? 'Investigabiles
406 viæ ejus.'"

407 He remained silent for some time; then he said, "Father, I mean to dedicate myself to
408 God, simply, absolutely, with His grace. I will be His, and He shall be mine. No one shall
409 come between us. But O this weak heart!"

410 "Keep your good resolves till you are stronger," said the priest. "It is easy to make them
411 on a sickbed. You must first reckon the charges." {158}

412 Agellius smiled. "I know the passage, father," he said, and he repeated the sacred
413 words: "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife, and
414 children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My
415 disciple."

416 Another time Agellius said: "The Martyrs; surely the old bishop used to say something
417 about the Martyrs. He spoke of a second baptism, and called it a baptism of blood; and
418 said, 'Might his soul be with the Martyrs!' Father, would not this wash out every thing, as
419 the first?"

420 It was now Cæcilius who smiled, and his eyes shone like the sapphires of the Holy City;
421 and he seemed the ideal of him who, when

422 "Called upon to face
423 Some awful moment to which heaven has joined
424 Great issues, good or bad for humankind,
425 Is happy as a lover, and attired
426 With sudden brightness, like a man inspired."

427 However, he soon controlled himself, and said, "Quo ego vado, non potes me modo
428 sequi; sequeris autem postea."