

## Chapter 14. A Small Cloud

1 {159} THIS sort of intercourse, growing in frequency and fulness, went on for about a  
2 week, till Agellius was able to walk with support, and to leave the cottage. The priest  
3 and his own slave took him between them, and seated him one evening in sight of the  
4 glorious prospect, traversed by the long shadow of the far mountains, behind which the  
5 sun was making its way. The air was filled with a thousand odours; the brilliant colouring  
6 of the western heavens was contrasted with the more sober but varied tints of the rich  
7 country. The wheat and barley harvest was over; but the beans were late, and still stood  
8 in the fields. The olives and chestnut-trees were full of fruit; the early fig was supplying  
9 the markets with food; and the numerous vineyards were patiently awaiting the suns of  
10 the next month slowly to perfect their present promise. The beautiful scene had a moral  
11 dignity, from its associations with human sustenance and well-being. The inexpressible  
12 calmness of evening was flung, like a robe, over it. Its sweetness was too much for one  
13 who had been confined {160} to the monotony of a sick-room, and was still an invalid.  
14 He sat silent, and in tears. It was life from the dead; and he felt he had risen to a  
15 different life. And thus he came out evening after evening convalescent, gradually and  
16 surely advancing to perfect restoration of his health.

17 One evening he said, after feeding his eyes and thoughts for some time with the  
18 prospect, "'Mansueti hereditabunt terram.' They alone have real enjoyment of this earth  
19 who believe in its Maker. Every breath of air seems to whisper how good He is to me."

20 Cæcilius answered, "These sights are the shadows of that fairer Paradise which is our  
21 home, where there is no beast of prey, no venomous reptile, no sin. My child,  
22 should I not feel this more than you? Those who are shut up in crowded cities see but  
23 the work of man, which is evil. It is the compensation of my flight from Carthage that I  
24 am brought before the face of God."

25 "The heathen worship all this, as if God Himself," said Agellius; "how strange it seems to  
26 me that any one can forget the Creator in His works!"

27 Cæcilius was silent for a moment, and sighed; he then said, "You have ever been a  
28 Christian, Agellius."

29 "And you have not, my father?" answered he; "well, you have earned that grace which  
30 came to me freely."

31 "Agellius," said the priest, "it comes freely to all; and is only merited when it has already  
32 prevailed. {161} Yet I think you earned it too, else why the difference between you and  
33 your brother?"

34 "What do you know of us?" asked Agellius quickly.

35 "Not a great deal," answered he, "yet something. Three or four years back an effort was  
36 made to rekindle the Christian spirit in these parts, and to do something for the

37 churches of the proconsulate, and to fill up the vacant sees. Nothing has come of it as  
38 yet; but steps were taken towards it: one was to obtain a recovery of the Christians who  
39 remained in them. I was sent here for that purpose, and in this way heard of you and  
40 your brother. When my life was threatened by the persecution, and I had to flee, I  
41 thought of your cottage. I was obliged to act secretly, as we did not know friends from  
42 foes."

43 "You were led here for other purposes towards *me*, my father," said Agellius; "yet you  
44 cannot have a safer refuge. There is nothing to disturb, nothing to cause suspicion here.  
45 In this harvest time numbers of strangers pour in from the mountains, of various races;  
46 there is nothing to distinguish you from one of them, and my brother is away conveying  
47 some grain to Carthage. Persecution drove you hither, but you have not been suffered  
48 to be idle, my father, you have brought home a wanderer." He added, after a pause, "I  
49 am well enough to go to confession to you now. May it be this evening?"

50 "It will be well," answered Cæcilius; "how long I shall still be here, I cannot tell. I am  
51 expecting my {162} trusty messenger with despatches. It is now three days since he  
52 was here. However, this I say without misgiving, we do not part for long. What do you  
53 here longer? you must come to me. I must prepare you, and send you bank to Sicca, to  
54 collect and restore this scattered flock."

55 Agellius turned, and leaned against the priest's shoulder, and laughed. "I am laughing,"  
56 he said, "not from lightness of mind, but from the depth of surprise and of joy that you  
57 should so think of me. It was a dream which once I had; but impossible! you do not think  
58 that I, weak I, shall ever be able to do more than save my own soul?"

59 "You will save your own soul by saving the souls of others," said Cæcilius; "my child, I  
60 could tell you more things if I thought it good for you."

61 "But, my father, I have so weak, so soft a heart," cried Agellius; "what am I to do with  
62 myself? I am not of the temper of which heroes are made."

63 "'Virtus in infirmitate perficitur,'" said the priest. "What! are you to do *any* thing of  
64 yourself? or are you to be simply the instrument of Another? We shall have the same  
65 termination, you and myself, but you long after me."

66 "Ah, father, because *you* will burn out so much more quickly!" said Agellius.

67 "I think," said Cæcilius, "I see my messenger; there is some one who has made his way  
68 by stealth into the garden, or at least not by the beaten way."

69 There was a visitor, as Cæcilius had said; however, {163} it was not his messenger, but  
70 Juba, who approached, looking with great curiosity at Cæcilius, and absorbed in the  
71 sight. Cæcilius in turn regarded him steadfastly, and then said to Agellius, "It is your  
72 brother."

73 "What brings you here, Juba?" said the latter.

74 "I have been away on a distant errand," said Juba; "and find you have been ill. Is this  
75 your nurse?" he eyed him almost sternly, and added, "'Tis a Christian priest."

76 "Has Agellius no acquaintance but Christians?" asked Cæcilius.

77 "Acquaintance! O surely!" answered Juba; "agreeable, innocent, sweet acquaintance of  
78 another sort; myself to begin with. My lad," he continued, "you did not rise to their price,  
79 but you did your best."

80 "Juba," said his brother, "if you have any business here, say it, and have done. I am not  
81 strong enough to hold any altercation with you."

82 "Business!" said Juba, "I can find quite business enough here, if I choose. This is a  
83 priest of the Christians. I am sure of it."

84 Cæcilius looked at him with such calmness and benevolence, that at length Juba turned  
85 away his eyes with something of irritation. He said, "If I *am* a priest, I am here to claim  
86 you as one of my children."

87 Juba winced, but said scornfully, "You are mistaken there, father; speak to those who  
88 own you. I am a free man." {164}

89 "My son," Cæcilius answered, "you have been under instruction; it is your duty to go  
90 forward, not back."

91 "What do you know about me?" said Juba; "he has been telling."

92 "Your face, your manner, your voice, tells a tale; I need no information from others. I  
93 have heard of you years ago; now I see you."

94 "What do you see in me?" said Juba.

95 "I see pride in bodily shape, treading down faith and conviction," said Cæcilius.

96 Juba neighed rather than laughed, so fierce and scornful was its expression. "What you  
97 slaves call pride," he said, "I call dignity."

98 "You believe in a God, Creator of heaven and earth, as certainly as I do," said the  
99 priest, "but you deliberately set yourself against Him."

100 Juba smiled. "I am as free," he said, "in my place, as He in His."

101 "You mean," answered Cæcilius, "free to do wrong, and free to suffer for it."

102 "You may call it wrong, and call it suffering," replied Juba; "but for me, / do not call  
103 wrong what He calls wrong; and if He puts me to pain, it is because He is the stronger."

104 The priest stopped awhile; there was no emotion on either side. It was strange to see  
105 them so passionless, so antagonistic, like St. Michael and his adversary.

106 "There is that within you," said Cæcilius, "which {165} speaks as I speak. That inward  
107 voice takes the part of the Creator, and condemns you."

108 "*He* put it there," said Juba; "and / will take care to put it out."

109 "Then He will have justice as well as power on His side," said the priest.

110 "I will never fawn or crouch," said Juba; "I will be lord and master in my own soul. Every  
111 faculty shall be mine; there shall be no divided allegiance."

112 Cæcilius paused again; he said at length, "My son, my soul tells me, or rather my Maker  
113 tells me, and your Maker, that some heavy judgment is impending over you. Do  
114 penance while you may."

115 "Tell your forebodings to women and children," said Juba; "I am prepared for anything. I  
116 will not be crushed."

117 Agellius was not strong enough to bear a part in such a scene. "Father," he said, "it is  
118 his way, but don't believe him. He has better thoughts. Away with you, Juba, you are not  
119 wanted here."

120 "Agellius," said the priest, "such words are not strange to me. I am not young, and have  
121 seen much of the world; and my very office and position elicits blasphemies from others  
122 from time to time. I knew a man who carried out his bad thoughts and words into act.  
123 Abjuring his Maker, he abandoned himself to the service of the evil one. He betrayed his  
124 brethren to death. He lived on year after year, and became old. He was smitten with  
125 illness; then I first saw him. I made him contemplate a picture; it was the picture of {166}  
126 the Good Shepherd. I dwelt on the vain efforts of the poor sheep to get out of the fold;  
127 its irrational aversion to its home, and its desperate resolution to force a way through  
128 the prickly fence. It was pierced and torn with the sharp aloe; at last it lay imprisoned in  
129 its stern embrace, motionless and bleeding. Then the Shepherd, though He had to  
130 wound His own hands in the work, disengaged it, and brought it back. God has His own  
131 times; His power went along with the picture, and the man was moved. I said, '*This* is  
132 His return for your enmity: He is determined to have you, cost Him what it will.' I need  
133 not go through the many things that followed, but the issue may be told in few words.  
134 He came back; he lived a life of penance at the Church's door; he received the peace of  
135 the Church in immediate prospect of the persecution, and has within the last ten days  
136 died a martyr's death."

137 Juba had listened as if he was constrained against his will. When the priest stopped he  
138 started, and began to speak impetuously, and unlike his ordinary tone. He placed his  
139 hands violently against his ears. "Stop!" he said, "no more. *I* will not betray them; no:  
140 *I need* not betray them;" he laughed; "the black moor does the work himself. Look," he  
141 cried, seizing the priest's arm, and pointing to a part of the forest, which happened to be  
142 to windward. "You are in their number, priest, who can foretell the destinies of others,  
143 and are blind to their own. Read there, the task is not hard, your coming fortunes." {167}

144 His finger was directed to a spot where, amid the thick foliage, the gleam of a pool or of  
145 a marsh was visible. The various waters round about issuing from the gravel, or drained  
146 from the nightly damp, had run into a hollow, filled with the decaying vegetation of  
147 former years, and were languidly filtered out into a brook, more healthy than the vast  
148 reservoir itself. Its banks were bordered with a deep, broad layer of mud, a transition  
149 substance between the rich vegetable matter which it once had been, and the  
150 multitudinous world of insect life which it was becoming. A cloud or mist at this time was  
151 hanging over it, high in air. A harsh and shrill sound, a whizzing or a chirping,  
152 proceeded from that cloud to the ear of the attentive listener. What these indications  
153 portended was plain. "There," said Juba, "is what will tell more against you than imperial  
154 edict, informer, or proconsular apparitor; and no work of mine."

155 He turned down the bank and disappeared. Agellius and his guest looked at each other  
156 in dismay. "It is the locusts," they whispered to each other, as they went back into the  
157 cottage.

## Chapter 15. A Visitation

158 {168} THE plague of locusts, one of the most awful visitations to which the countries  
159 included in the Roman empire were exposed, extended from the Atlantic to Ethiopia,  
160 from Arabia to India, and from the Nile and Red Sea to Greece and the north of Asia  
161 Minor. Instances are recorded in history of clouds of the devastating insect crossing the  
162 Black Sea to Poland, and the Mediterranean to Lombardy. It is as numerous in its  
163 species as it is wide in its range of territory. Brood follows brood, with a sort of family  
164 likeness, yet with distinct attributes, as we read in the prophets of the Old Testament,  
165 from whom Bochart tells us it is possible to enumerate as many as ten kinds. It wakens  
166 into existence and activity as early as the month of March; but instances are not  
167 wanting, as in our present history, of its appearance as late as June. Even one flight  
168 comprises myriads upon myriads passing imagination, to which the drops of rain or the  
169 sands of the sea are the only fit comparison; and hence it is almost a proverbial mode of  
170 expression in the East (as may be illustrated {169} by the sacred pages to which we just  
171 now referred), by way of describing a vast invading army, to liken it to the locusts. So  
172 dense are they, when upon the wing, that it is no exaggeration to say that they hide the  
173 sun, from which circumstance indeed their name in Arabic is derived. And so ubiquitous  
174 are they when they have alighted on the earth, that they simply cover or clothe its  
175 surface.

176 This last characteristic is stated in the sacred account of the plagues of Egypt, where  
177 their faculty of devastation is also mentioned. The corrupting fly and the bruising and  
178 prostrating hail had preceded them in that series of visitations, but *they* came to do the  
179 work of ruin more thoroughly. For not only the crops and fruits, but the foliage of the  
180 forest itself, nay, the small twigs and the bark of the trees are the victims of their curious  
181 and energetic rapacity. They have been known even to gnaw the door-posts of the  
182 houses. Nor do they execute their task in so slovenly a way, that, as they have  
183 succeeded other plagues so they may have successors themselves. They take pains to  
184 spoil what they leave. Like the Harpies, they smear every thing that they touch with a  
185 miserable slime, which has the effect of a virus in corroding, or, as some say, in  
186 scorching and burning it. And then, as if all this were little, when they can do nothing  
187 else, they die;—as if out of sheer malevolence to man, for the poisonous elements of  
188 their nature are then let loose, and dispersed abroad, and create a pestilence; and they  
189 {170} manage to destroy many more by their death than in their life.

190 Such are the locusts,—whose existence the ancient heretics brought forward as their  
191 palmary proof that there was an evil creator, and of whom an Arabian writer shows his  
192 national horror, when he says that they have the head of a horse, the eyes of an  
193 elephant, the neck of a bull, the horns of a stag, the breast of a lion, the belly of a  
194 scorpion, the wings of an eagle, the legs of a camel, the feet of an ostrich, and the tail of  
195 a serpent.

196 And now they are rushing upon a considerable tract of that beautiful region of which we  
197 have spoken with such admiration. The swarm to which Juba pointed grew and grew till  
198 it became a compact body, as much as a furlong square; yet it was but the vanguard of  
199 a series of similar hosts, formed one after another out of the hot mould or sand, rising  
200 into the air like clouds, enlarging into a dusky canopy, and then discharged against the  
201 fruitful plain. At length the huge innumerable mass was put into motion, and began its  
202 career, darkening the face of day. As became an instrument of divine power, it seemed  
203 to have no volition of its own; it was set off, it drifted, with the wind, and thus made  
204 northwards, straight for Sicca. Thus they advanced, host after host, for a time wafted on  
205 the air, and gradually declining to the earth, while fresh broods were carried over the  
206 first, and neared the earth, after a longer flight, in their turn. For twelve miles did they  
207 {171} extend from front to rear, and their whizzing and hissing could be heard for six  
208 miles on every side of them. The bright sun, though hidden by them, illumined their  
209 bodies, and was reflected from their quivering wings; and as they heavily fell earthward,  
210 they seemed like the innumerable flakes of a yellow-coloured snow. And like snow did  
211 they descend, a living carpet, or rather pall, upon fields, crops, gardens, copses, groves,  
212 orchards, vineyards, olive woods, orangeries, palm plantations, and the deep forests,  
213 sparing nothing within their reach, and where there was nothing to devour, lying  
214 helpless in drifts, or crawling forward obstinately, as they best might, with the hope of  
215 prey. They could spare their hundred thousand soldiers twice or thrice over, and not  
216 miss them; their masses filled the bottoms of the ravines and hollow ways, impeding the  
217 traveller as he rode forward on his journey, and trampled by thousands under his horse-  
218 hoofs. In vain was all this overthrow and waste by the road-side; in vain their loss in  
219 river, pool, and watercourse. The poor peasants hastily dug pits and trenches as their

220 enemy came on; in vain they filled them from the wells or with lighted stubble. Heavily  
221 and thickly did the locusts fall: they were lavish of their lives; they choked the flame and  
222 the water, which destroyed them the while, and the vast living hostile armament still  
223 moved on.

224 They moved right on like soldiers in their ranks, stopping at nothing, and straggling for  
225 nothing; {172} they carried a broad furrow or wheal all across the country, black and  
226 loathsome, while it was as green and smiling on each side of them and in front, as it had  
227 been before they came. Before them, in the language of prophets, was a paradise; and  
228 behind them a desert. They are daunted by nothing; they surmount walls and hedges,  
229 and enter enclosed gardens or inhabited houses. A rare and experimental vineyard has  
230 been planted in a sheltered grove. The high winds of Africa will not commonly allow the  
231 light trellis or the slim pole; but here the lofty poplar of Campania has been possible, on  
232 which the vine plant mounts so many yards into the air, that the poor grape-gatherers  
233 bargain for a funeral pile and a tomb as one of the conditions of their engagement. The  
234 locusts have done what the winds and lightning could not do, and the whole promise of  
235 the vintage, leaves and all, is gone, and the slender stems are left bare. There is  
236 another yard, less uncommon, but still tended with more than common care; each plant  
237 is kept within due bounds by a circular trench round it, and by upright canes on which it  
238 is to trail; in an hour the solitudine and long toil of the vine-dresser are lost, and his pride  
239 humbled. There is a smiling farm; another sort of vine, of remarkable character, is found  
240 against the farm-house. This vine springs from one root, and has clothed and matted  
241 with its many branches the four walls; the whole of it is covered thick with long clusters,  
242 which another month will {173} ripen:—on every grape and leaf there is a locust. Into  
243 the dry caves and pits, carefully strewed with straw, the harvest-men have (safely, as  
244 they thought just now) been lodging the far-famed African wheat. One grain or root  
245 shoots up into ten, twenty, fifty, eighty, nay, three or four hundred stalks: sometimes the  
246 stalks have two ears apiece, and these again shoot into a number of lesser ones. These  
247 stores are intended for the Roman populace, but the locusts have been beforehand with  
248 them. The small patches of ground belonging to the poor peasants up and down the  
249 country, for raising the turnips, garlic, barley, watermelons, on which they live, are the  
250 prey of these glutton invaders as much as the choicest vines and olives. Nor have they  
251 any reverence for the villa of the civic decurion or the Roman official. The neatly  
252 arranged kitchen-garden, with its cherries, plums, peaches, and apricots, is a waste; as  
253 the slaves sit round, in the kitchen in the first court, at their coarse evening meal, the  
254 room is filled with the invading force, and news comes to them that the enemy has fallen  
255 upon the apples and pears in the basement, and is at the same time plundering and  
256 sacking the preserves of quince and pomegranate, and revelling in the jars of precious  
257 oil of Cyprus and Mendes in the store-rooms.

258 They come up to the walls of Sicca, and are flung against them into the ditch. Not a  
259 moment's hesitation or delay; they recover their footing, they climb up the wood or  
260 stucco, they surmount the parapet, or {174} they have entered in at the windows, filling  
261 the apartments, and the most private and luxurious chambers, not one or two, like  
262 stragglers at forage or rioters after a victory, but in order of battle, and with the array of  
263 an army. Choice plants or flowers about the *impluvia* and *xysti*, for ornament or

264 refreshment, myrtles, oranges, pomegranates, the rose and the carnation, have  
265 disappeared. They dim the bright marbles of the walls and the gilding of the ceilings.  
266 They enter the triclinium in the midst of the banquet; they crawl over the viands and  
267 spoil what they do not devour. Unrelaxed by success and by enjoyment, onward they  
268 go; a secret mysterious instinct keeps them together, as if they had a king over them.  
269 They move along the floor in so strange an order that they seem to be a tessellated  
270 pavement themselves, and to be the artificial embellishment of the place; so true are  
271 their lines, and so perfect is the pattern they describe. Onward they go, to the market, to  
272 the temple sacrifices, to the baker's stores, to the cook-shops, to the confectioner's, to  
273 the druggists; nothing comes amiss to them; wherever man has aught to eat or drink,  
274 there are they, reckless of death, strong of appetite, certain of conquest.

275 They have passed on; the men of Sicca sadly congratulate themselves, and begin to  
276 look about them, and to sum up their losses. Being the proprietors of the neighbouring  
277 districts, or the purchasers of its produce, they lament over the devastation, not  
278 because the fair country is disfigured, but because income is {175} becoming scanty,  
279 and prices are becoming high. How is a population of many thousands to be fed? where  
280 is the grain, where the melons, the figs, the dates, the gourds, the beans, the grapes, to  
281 sustain and solace the multitudes in their lanes, caverns, and garrets? This is another  
282 weighty consideration for the class well-to-do in the world. The taxes, too, and  
283 contributions, the capitation tax, the percentage upon corn, the various articles of  
284 revenues due to Rome, how are they to be paid? How are cattle to be provided for the  
285 sacrifices and for the tables of the wealthy? One-half, at least, of the supply of Sicca is  
286 cut off. No longer slaves are seen coming into the city from the country in troops with  
287 their baskets on their shoulders, or beating forward the horse, or mule, or ox, overladen  
288 with its burden, or driving in the dangerous cow, or the unresisting sheep. The  
289 animation of the place is gone; a gloom hangs over the Forum; and if its frequenters are  
290 still merry there is something of sullenness and recklessness in their mirth. The gods  
291 have given the city up; something or other has angered them. Locusts, indeed, are no  
292 uncommon visitation, but at an earlier season. Perhaps some temple has been polluted,  
293 or some unholy rite practised, or some secret conspiracy has spread.

294 Another and a still worse calamity. The invaders, as we have already intimated, could  
295 be more terrible still in their overthrow than in their ravages. The inhabitants of the  
296 country had attempted, where {176} they could, to destroy them by fire and water. It  
297 would seem as if the malignant animals had resolved that the sufferers should have the  
298 benefit of this policy to the full; for they had not got more than twenty miles beyond  
299 Sicca when they suddenly sickened and died. Thus after they had done all the mischief  
300 they could by their living, when they had made their foul maws the grave of every living  
301 thing, then they died themselves, and made the desolated land their own grave. They  
302 took from it its hundred forms and varieties of beautiful life, and left it their own fetid and  
303 poisonous carcasses in payment. It was a sudden catastrophe; they seemed making for  
304 the Mediterranean, as if, like other great conquerors, they had other worlds to subdue  
305 beyond it; but whether they were overgorged, or struck by some atmospheric change, or  
306 that their time was come and they paid the debt of nature, so it was that suddenly they

307 fell, and their glory came to nought, and all was vanity to them as to others, and "their  
308 stench rose up, and their corruption rose up, because they had done proudly."

309 The hideous swarms lay dead in the moist steaming underwoods, in the green swamps,  
310 in the sheltered valleys, in the ditches and furrows of the fields, amid the monuments of  
311 their own prowess, the ruined crops and the dishonoured vineyards. A poisonous  
312 element, issuing from their remains, mingled with the atmosphere, and corrupted it. The  
313 dismayed peasant found that a pestilence had begun; a new {177} visitation, not  
314 confined to the territory which the enemy had made its own, but, extending far and wide,  
315 as the atmosphere extends, in all directions. Their daily toil, no longer claimed by the  
316 produce of the earth, which has ceased to exist, is now devoted to the object of ridding  
317 themselves of the deadly legacy which they have received in its stead. In vain; it is their  
318 last toil; they are digging pits, they are raising piles, for their own corpses, as well as for  
319 the bodies of their enemies. Invader and victim lie in the same grave, burn in the same  
320 heap; they sicken while they work, and the pestilence spreads. A new invasion is  
321 menacing Sicca, in the shape of companies of peasants and slaves, (the panic having  
322 broken the bonds of discipline,) with their employers and overseers, nay the farmers  
323 themselves and proprietors, rushing thither from famine and infection as to a place of  
324 safety. The inhabitants of the city are as frightened as they, and more energetic. They  
325 determine to keep them at a distance; the gates are closed; a strict *cordon* is drawn;  
326 however, by the continued pressure, numbers contrive to make an entrance, as water  
327 into a vessel, or light through the closed shutters, and anyhow the air cannot be put into  
328 quarantine; so the pestilence has the better of it, and at last appears in the alleys, and in  
329 the cellars of Sicca.

#### Chapter 16. Worse and Worse

330 {178} "O WRETCHED minds of men! O blind hearts!" truly cries out a great heathen  
331 poet, but on grounds far other than the true ones. The true ground of such a lamentation  
332 is, that men do not interpret the signs of the times and of the world as He intends who  
333 has placed these signs in the heavens; that when Mane, Thecel, Phares, is written upon  
334 the ethereal wall, they have no inward faculty to read them withal; and that when they  
335 go elsewhere for one learned in tongues, instead of taking Daniel, who is used to  
336 converse with Angels, they rely on Magi or Chaldeans, who know only the languages of  
337 earth. So it was with the miserable population of Sicca now; half famished, seized with a  
338 pestilence which was sure to rage before it assuaged, perplexed and oppressed by the  
339 recoil upon them of the population whom they had from time to time sent out into the  
340 surrounding territory, or from whom they had supplied their markets, they never fancied  
341 that the real cause of the visitation which we have been describing was their own  
342 iniquity in their Maker's sight, that His arm inflicted it, and that its natural and direct {179}  
343 interpretation was, "Do penance, and be converted." On the contrary, they looked only  
344 at their own vain idols, and at the vain rites which these idols demanded, and they  
345 thought there was no surer escape from their misery than by upholding a lie, and putting  
346 down all who revolted from it; and thus the visitation which was sent to do them good  
347 turned through their wilful blindness to their greater condemnation.

348 The Forum, which at all times was the resort of idleness and dissipation, now became  
349 more and more the haunt of famine and sickness, of robust frames without work, of  
350 slavish natures virtually and for the time emancipated and uncontrolled, of youth and  
351 passion houseless and shelterless. In groups and companies, in and out of the  
352 porticoes, on the steps of the temples, and about the booths and stalls of the market, a  
353 multitude grows day by day, from the town and from the country, and of all the various  
354 races which town and country contain. The civil magistracy and the civil force to which  
355 the peace of the city was committed, were not equal to such an emergency as the  
356 present; and the *milites stationarii*, a sort of garrison who represented the Roman  
357 power, though they were ready to act against either magistrates or mob impartially, had  
358 no tenderness for either, when in collision with each other. Indeed the bonds of society  
359 were broken, and every political element was at war with every other, in a case of such  
360 great common calamity, when every one was angry with {180} every one else, for want  
361 of some clearly defined object against which the common anger might be discharged  
362 with unanimity.

363 They had almost given over sacrificing and consulting the flame or the entrails; for no  
364 reversal or respite of their sufferings had followed their most assiduous acts of  
365 deprecation. Moreover the omens were generally considered by the priests to have  
366 been unpropitious or adverse. A sheep had been discovered to have, instead of a liver,  
367 something very like a gizzard; a sow had chewed and swallowed the flowers with which  
368 it had been embellished for the sacrifice; and a calf, after receiving the fatal blow,  
369 instead of lying down and dying, dashed into the temple, dripping blood upon the  
370 pavement as it went, and at last fell and expired just before the sacred *adytum*. In  
371 despair the people took to fortune-telling and its attendant arts. Old crones were found  
372 in plenty with their strange rites, the stranger the more welcome. Trenches were dug in  
373 by-places for sacrifices to the infernal gods; amulets, rings, counters, tablets, pebbles,  
374 nails, bones, feathers, Ephesian or Egyptian legends, were in request, and raised the  
375 hopes, or beguiled and occupied the thoughts, of those who else would have been  
376 directly dwelling on their sufferings, present or in prospect.

377 Others were occupied, whether they would or no, with diversions fiercer and more  
378 earnest. There were continual altercations between farmers, small proprietors of land,  
379 government and city officials,—altercations {181} so manifold and violent, that, even  
380 were there no hubbub of voices, and no incoherence of wrath and fear to complicate  
381 them, we should despair of setting them before the reader. An officer from the camp  
382 was expostulating with one of the municipal authorities that no corn had been sent  
383 thither for the last six or seven days, and the functionary attacked had thrown the blame  
384 on the farmer, and he in turn had protested that he could not get cattle to bring the  
385 waggons into Sicca; those which he had set out with had died of exhaustion on the  
386 journey. A clerk, as we now speak, in the *Officium* of the society of publicans or  
387 collectors of *annona* was threatening a number of small tenants with ejection for not  
388 sending in their rated portion of corn for the Roman people:—the *Officium* of  
389 the *Notarius*, or assistant prefect, had written up to Sicca from Carthage in violent  
390 terms; and come it must, though the locusts had eaten up every stack and granary. A  
391 number of half-starved peasants had been summoned for payment of their taxes, and in

392 spite of their ignorance of Latin, they had been made to understand that death was the  
393 stern penalty of neglecting to bring the coin. They, on the other hand, by their fierce  
394 doggedness of manner, seemed to signify by way of answer that death was not a  
395 penalty, unless life was a boon.

396 The *villicus* of one of the decurions, who had an estate in the neighbourhood, was  
397 laying his miseries before the man of business of his employer. "What are we to do?" he  
398 said. "Half the gang of slaves {182} is dead, and the other half is so feeble, that I can't  
399 get through the work of the month. We ought to be sheep-shearing; you have no chance  
400 of wool. We ought to be swarming the bees, pressing the honey, boiling and purifying  
401 the wax. We ought to be plucking the white leaves of the camomile, and steeping the  
402 golden flowers in oil. We ought to be gathering the wild grapes, sifting off the flowers,  
403 and preserving the residue in honey. We ought to be sowing brassicum, parsley, and  
404 coriander against next spring. We ought to be cheese-making. We ought to be baking  
405 white and red bricks and tiles in the sun: we have no hands for the purpose.  
406 The *villicus* is not to blame, but the anger of the gods." The country *employé* of the  
407 procurator of the imperial *Baphia* protests that the insect cannot be found from which  
408 the dye is extracted; and argues that the locusts must have devoured them, or the plant  
409 on which they feed, or that they have been carried off by the pestilence. Here is old  
410 Corbulus in agonies for his febrifuge, and a slave of his is in high words with the market-  
411 carrier, who tells him that Mago, who supplied it, is dead of a worse fever than his  
412 master's. "The rogue," cried the slave, "my master has contracted with him for the year,  
413 and has paid him the money in advance." A jeering and mocking from the crowd  
414 assailed the unfortunate domestic, who so truly foreboded that his return without the  
415 medicine would be the signal for his summary committal to the *pistrinum*. "Let old  
416 Corbulus follow {183} Mago in his passage to perdition," said one of the rabble; "let him  
417 take his physic with Pluto, and leave us the bread and wine on which he's grown gouty."  
418 "Bread, bread!" was the response elicited by this denunciation, and it spread into a  
419 circle larger than that of which the slave and the carrier were part.

420 "Wine and bread, Ceres and Liber!" cried a young legionary, who, after a night of  
421 revelry, was emerging still half-intoxicated from one of the low wine-shops in the vaults  
422 which formed the basement of the *Thermæ* or hot baths; "make way there, you filthy  
423 slime of the earth, you half-kneaded, half-fermented Africans, who never yet have quite  
424 been men, but have ever smelt strong of the baboon, who are three quarters *must*, and  
425 two vinegar, and a fifth water,—as I was saying, you are like bad liquor, and the sight of  
426 you disagrees with the stomach and affects the eyes."

427 The crowd looked sullenly, and without wincing, at his shield, which was the only portion  
428 of his military accoutrements which he had preserved after his carouse. The white  
429 surface, with a silver boss in the centre, surrounded by first a white and then a red  
430 circle, and the purple border, showed that he belonged to the Tertiani or third Italic  
431 Legion, which had been stationed in Africa since the time of Augustus. "Vile double-  
432 tongued mongrels," he continued, "what are you fit for but to gather the fruits of the  
433 earth for your owners and lords, {184} 'Romanos dominos rerum'? And if there are now  
434 no fruits to reap, why your service is gone. Go home and die, and drown yourselves, for

435 what are you fit for now, except to take your dead corpses away from the nostrils of a  
436 Roman, the cream of humankind? Ye base-born apes, that's why you catch the  
437 pestilence, because our blood mantles and foams in our ruddy veins like new milk in the  
438 wine cup, which is too strong for this clime, and my blood is up, and I drink a full  
439 measure of it to great Rome; for what does old Horace say, but 'Nunc est bibendum'?  
440 and so get out of my way."

441 To a good part of the multitude, both peasantry and town rabble, Latin was  
442 unintelligible; but they all understood vocabulary and syntax and logic, as soon as he  
443 drew his knuckles across one fellow's face who refused to move from his path, and as  
444 soon as his insult was returned by the latter with a thrust of the dagger. A rush was  
445 made upon him, on which he made a face at them, shook his fist, and leaping on one  
446 side, ran with great swiftness to an open space in advance. From his quarrelsome  
447 humour rather than from fear, he raised a cry of alarm; on which two or three fellow-  
448 soldiers made their appearance from similar dens of intoxication and vice, and came up  
449 to the rescue. The mob assailed them with stones, and the cream of human nature was  
450 likely to be roughly churned, when, seeing matters were becoming serious, they  
451 suddenly took to their heels, and got into the Temple of {185} Esculapius on one side of  
452 the Forum. The mob followed, the ministers of the sacred place attempted to shut the  
453 gates, a scuffle ensued, and a riot was in progress. Self-preservation is the first law of  
454 man; trembling for the safety of his noble buildings, and considering that it was a bread  
455 riot, as it really was, the priest of the god came forward, rebuked the mob for its impiety,  
456 and showed the absurdity of supposing that there were loaves in his enclosure to satisfy  
457 its wants; but he reminded them that there was a baker's shop at the other end of the  
458 Forum, which was one of the most considerable in Sicca.

459 A slight impulse determines the movements of an excited multitude. Off they went to the  
460 quarter in question, where certainly there was the very large and handsome store of a  
461 substantial dealer in grain of all sorts, and in other produce. The shop, however,  
462 seemed on this occasion to be but poorly furnished; for the baker was a prudent man,  
463 and feared a display of provisions which would be an invitation to a hungry multitude.  
464 The assailants, however, were not to be baffled; some one cried out that the man had  
465 withdrawn his corn from the market for his own ends, and that great stores were  
466 accumulated within. They avail themselves of the hint; they pour in through the open  
467 front, the baker escapes as he may, his mills and ovens are smashed, the house is  
468 ransacked; whatever is found is seized, thrown about, wasted, eaten, as the case may  
469 be; and the mob gains strength and appetite for fresh exploits. {186}

470 However, the rioters have no definite plan of action yet. Some of them have penetrated  
471 into the stable behind the house in search of corn. They find the mill-ass which ground  
472 for the baker, and bring it out. It is a beast of more than ordinary pretensions, such as  
473 you would not often see in a mill, showing both the wealth of the owner and the  
474 flourishing condition of his trade. The asses of Africa are finer than those in the north;  
475 but this is fine for an African. One fellow mounts upon it, and sets off with the world  
476 before him, like a knight-errant, seeking an adventure, the rabble at his tail acting as  
477 squire. He begins the circuit of the Forum, and picks up its riff-raff as he goes along—

478 here some rascal boys, there some drunken women, here again a number of half-  
479 brutalized country slaves and peasants. Partly out of curiosity, partly from idleness, from  
480 ill temper, from hope of spoil, from a vague desire to be doing something or other, every  
481 one who has nothing to lose by the adventure crowds around and behind him. And on  
482 the contrary, as he advances, and the noise and commotion increase, every one who  
483 has a position of any sort, the confidential *vernæ* of great families, farmers,  
484 shopkeepers, men of business, officials, vanish from the scene of action without delay.

485 "Africa, Africa!" is now the cry; the signal in that country, as an ancient writer tells us,  
486 that the parties raising it have something new in hand, and have a mind to do it.

487 Suddenly, as they march on, a low and awful growl {187} is heard. It comes from the  
488 booth of a servant of the imperial court. He is employed as a transporter of wild beasts  
489 from the interior to the coast, where they are shipped for Rome; and he has charge at  
490 present of a noble lion, who is sitting majestically, looking through the bars of his cage  
491 at the rabble, who now begin to look at him. In demeanour and in mental endowments  
492 he has the advantage of them. It was at this moment, while they were closing, hustling  
493 each other, staring at the beast, and hoping to provoke him, that a shrill voice cried out,  
494 "Christianos ad leones, Christianos ad leones!" the Christians to the lions! A sudden  
495 and dead silence ensued, as if the words had struck the breath out of the promiscuous  
496 throng. An interval passed; and then the same voice was heard again, "Christianos ad  
497 leones!" This time the whole Forum took it up from one end to the other. The fate of the  
498 day, the direction of the movement, was decided; a distinct object was obtained, and the  
499 only wonder was that the multitude had been so long to seek and so slow to find so  
500 obvious a cause of their misfortunes, so adequate a subject of their vengeance.  
501 "Christianos ad leones!" was shouted out by town and country, priests and people.  
502 "Long live the emperor! long live Decius! he told us this long ago. There's the edict; it  
503 never has been obeyed. Death to the magistrates! To the Christians! to the Christians!  
504 Up with great Jove, down with the atheists!"

505 They were commencing their march when the ass caught their eye. "The Christians'  
506 god!" they shouted out; "the god of the Christians! "Their first impulse was to give the  
507 poor beast to the lion, their next to sacrifice it, but they did not know to whom. Then they  
508 said they would make the Christians worship it; and dressing it up in tawdry finery, they  
509 retained it at the head of their procession.