

Chapter 30. Torres Vedras

{329} THERE were those, however, whom Callista could understand, and who could understand her; there were those who, while Aristo, Cornelius, Jucundus, and Polemo were moving in her behalf, were interesting themselves also in her, and in a more effectual way. Agellius had joined Cæcilius, and, if in no other way, by his mouth came to the latter and his companions the news of her imprisonment. On the morning that Agellius had been so strangely let out of confinement by his brother, and found himself seated at the street-door, with his tunic on his arm and his boots on the ground before him, his first business was to recollect where he was, and to dispose of those articles of dress according to their respective uses. What should he do with himself, was of course his second thought. He could not stay there long without encountering the early risers of Sicca, the gates being already open. To attempt to find out where Callista was, and then to see her or rescue her, would have ended at once in his own capture. To go to his own farm would have been nearly as dangerous, and would have had less {330} meaning. Cæcilius too had said, that they were not long to be separated, and had given him directions for finding him.

Immediately then he made his way to one of the eastern gates, which led to Thibursicumbur. There was indeed no time to be lost, as he soon had indications; he met several men who knew him by sight, and one of the apparitors of the Duumviri, who happily did not. An apostate Christian, whose zeal for the government was notorious, passed him and looked back after him. However, he would soon be out of pursuit, if he had the start of them until the sun got round the mountains he was seeking. He walked on through a series of rocky and barren hills, till he got some way past the second milestone. Before he had reached the third he had entered a defile in the mountains. Perpendicular rocks rose on each side of him, and the level road, reaching from rock to rock, was not above thirty feet across. He felt that if he was pursued here, there was no escape. The third milestone passed, he came to the country road; he pursued it, counting out his thousand steps, as Cæcilius had instructed him. By this time it had left the stony bottom, and was rising up the side of the precipice. Brushwood and dwarf pines covered it, mingled with a few olives and caroubas. He said out his seven pater nosters as he walked, and then looked around. He had just passed a goatherd, and they looked hard at each other. Agellius wished him good morning.

"You are wishing a kid for Bacchus, sir," said the {331} man to him as he was running his eye over the goats. On Agellius answering in the negative, he said in a clownish way, "He who does not sacrifice to Bacchus does not sacrifice goats."

Agellius, bearing in mind Cæcilius's directions, saw of course there was something in the words which did not meet the ear, and answered carelessly, "He who does not sacrifice, does not sacrifice to Bacchus."

"True," said the man, "but perhaps you prefer a lamb for a sacrifice."

Agellius replied, "If it is the right one; but the one I mean was slain long since."

40 The man, without any change of manner, went on to say that there was an
41 acquaintance of his not far up the rock, who could perhaps satisfy him on the point. He
42 said, "Follow those wild olives, though the path seems broken, and you will come to him
43 at the nineteenth."

44 Agellius set out, and never was path so untrue to its own threats. It seemed ending in
45 abrupt cliffs every turn, but never fulfilled the anticipation; that is, while he kept to the
46 olive-trees. After ascending what was rather a flight of marble steps, washed and
47 polished by the winter torrents, than a series of crags, he fulfilled the number of trees,
48 and looked round at the man sitting under it. O the joy and surprise! it was his old
49 servant Aspar.

50 "You are safe, then, Aspar," he said, "and I find you here. O what a tender Providence!"

51 "I have taken my stand here, master," returned {332} Aspar, "day after day, since I got
52 here, in hopes of seeing you. I could not get back to you from Jucundus's that dreadful
53 morning, and so I made my way here. Your uncle sent for you in my presence, but at
54 the time I did not know what it meant. I was able to escape."

55 "And now for Cæcilius," said Agellius.

56 Behind the olive-tree a torrent's bed descended; the descent being so easy, and yet so
57 natural, that art had evidently interfered with nature, yet concealed its interference. After
58 tracing it some yards, they came to a chasm on the opposite side; and, passing through
59 it, Agellius soon found himself, to his surprise, on a bleak open hill, to which the huge
60 mountain formed merely a sort of *façade*. Its surface was half rock, half moor, and it
61 was surrounded by precipices. It was such a place as some hermit of the middle ages
62 might have chosen for his solitude. The two walked briskly across it, and at length came
63 to a low, broad yawning opening, branching out into several passages which, if pursued,
64 would have been found to end in nothing. Aspar, however, made straight for what
65 appeared a dead wall of rock, in which, on his making a signal, a door, skilfully hidden,
66 was opened from within, and was shut behind them by the porter. They now stood in a
67 gallery running into the mountain. It was very long, and a stream of cold air came along
68 it. Aspar told him that at the extremity of it they should find Cæcilius.

69 Agellius was indeed in the vestibule of a remarkable {333} specimen of those caves
70 which had been used for religious purposes, first by the aborigines of the country, then
71 by the Phœnician colonists, and in the centuries which had just passed, for the
72 concealment of the Christians. The passage along which they were proceeding might
73 itself be fitly called a cave, but still it was only one of several natural subterraneans, of
74 different shapes, and opening into each other. Some of them lay along the face of a
75 ravine, from which they received light and air; and here in one place there were
76 indications of a fortified front. They were perfectly dry, though the water had at some
77 remote period filtered through the roof, and had formed pendants and pillars of semi-
78 transparent stalactite, of great beauty. It was another and singular advantage that a
79 particular spot in one of the caverns, which bordered on the ravine, was the focus of an

immense ear or whispering-gallery, such, that whatever took place in the public road in which the ravine terminated, could be distinctly heard there, and thus they were always kept on guard against the attack of an enemy, if expected. Had either Agellius or Aspar been curious about such a matter, the latter might have pointed out the place where a Punic altar once had been discovered, with a sort of *tumulus* of bones of mice near at hand, that animal coming into the list of victims in the Phœnician worship.

But the two Christians were engaged, as they first halted, and then walked along the corridor, in other thoughts, than in asking and answering questions {334} about the history of the place of refuge in which they found themselves. We have already remarked on the central position of Sicca for the purpose of missionary work and of retreat in persecution; such a dwelling in the rocks did but increase its advantageousness, and in consequence at this moment many Christians had availed themselves of it. It is an English proverb that three removes are as bad as a fire; and so great were the perils and the hardships of flight in those times, that it was a question, in a merely earthly point of view, whether the risk of being apprehended at home was not a far less evil than the evils which were certain upon leaving it. There was nothing, then, ungenerous in the ecclesiastical rule that they alone should flee, in persecution, who were marked out for death, if they stayed. The laity, private families, and the priests, on whose ministrations they depended, remained; bishops, deacons, and what may be called the staff of the episcopate, notaries, messengers, seminarists, and ascetics, would disappear from the scene of persecution.

Agellius learned from his slave that the cave had been known to him from the time he was a boy, and that it was one of the secrets which all who shared it religiously observed. Holy men, it seemed, had had intimations of the present trial for several years past; and it was the full persuasion of the heads of the Church, that, though it might blow over for a short time, it would recur at intervals for many years, ending in a visitation so heavy and long, that the times {335} of Antichrist would seem to have arrived. However, the impression upon their minds was, that then would come a millennium, or, in some sort, a reign of the saints upon the earth. That, however, was a date which even Agellius himself, young as he was, would not be likely to reach; indeed, who could expect to escape, who might not hope to gain, a Martyr's death, in the interval, in the series of assaults, between which Christianity had to run the gauntlet? Aspar said, moreover, that some martyrs lay in the chapels within, and that various confessors had ended their days there. At the present time there were representatives, there collected, of a large portion of the Churches of the Proconsulate. A post, so to call it, went between them and Carthage every week, and his friend and father, the bishop of that city, was especially busy in correspondence.

Moreover, Agellius learned from him that they had many partisans, well-wishers, and sympathizers, about the country, whom no one suspected; the families of parents who had conformed to the established worship, nay, sometimes the apostates themselves, and that this was the case in Sicca as well as elsewhere. For himself, old and ignorant as he was, the persecution had proved to him an education. He had been brought near great men, and some who, he was confident, would be martyrs in the event. He had

123 learned a great deal about his religion which he did not know before, and had drunk in
124 the spirit of Christianity, with a fulness which he trusted would not turn to his {336}
125 ultimate condemnation. He now too had a consciousness of the size and populousness
126 of the Church, of her diffusion, of the promises made to her, of the essential necessity of
127 what seemed to be misfortune, of the episcopal regimen, and of the power and solidity
128 of the see of Peter afar off in Rome, all which knowledge had made him quite another
129 being. We have put all this into finer language than the good old man used himself, and
130 we have grouped it more exactly, but this is what his words would come to, when
131 explained.

132 Coming down to sublunary matters, Aspar said the cave was well provisioned; they had
133 bread, oil, figs, dried grapes, and wine. They had vessels and vestments for the Holy
134 Sacrifice. Their serious want was a dearth of water at that season, but they relied on
135 Divine Providence to give them by miracle, if in no other way, a supply. The place was
136 piercingly cold too in the winter.

137 By this time they had gained the end of the long gallery, and passed through a second
138 apartment, when suddenly the sounds of the ecclesiastical chant burst on the ear of
139 Agellius. How strange, how transporting to him! he was almost for the first time coming
140 home to his father's house, though he had been a Christian from a child, and never, as
141 he trusted, to leave it, now that it was found. He did not know how to behave himself,
142 nor indeed where to go. Aspar conducted him into the seats set apart for the faithful; he
143 knelt down and burst into tears. {337}

144 It was approaching the third hour, the hour at which the Paraclete originally descended
145 upon the Apostles, and which, when times of persecution were passed, was appointed
146 in the West for the solemn mass of the day. In that early age, indeed, the time of the
147 solemnity was generally midnight, in order to elude observation; but even then such an
148 hour was considered of but temporary arrangement. Pope Telesphorus is said to have
149 prescribed the hour, afterwards in use, as early even as the second century; and in a
150 place of such quiet and security as the cavern in which we just now find ourselves, there
151 was no reason why it should not be selected. At the lower end of the chapel was a rail
152 extending across it, and open in the middle, where its two portions turned up at right
153 angles on each side towards the altar. The enclosure thus made was the place proper
154 for the faithful, into which Agellius had been introduced, and about fifty persons were
155 collected about him. Where the two side-rails which ran up the chapel ceased, there
156 was a broad step; and upon it two pulpits, one on each side. Then came a second
157 elevation, carrying the eye on to the extremity of the upper end.

158 In the middle of the wall at that upper end is a recess, occupied by a tomb. On the front
159 of it is written the name of some glorious champion of the faith who lies there. It is one
160 of the first bishops of Sicca, and the inscription attests that he slept in the Lord under
161 the Emperor Antoninus. Over the sacred relics is a slab, and on the slab the Divine
162 {338} Mysteries are now to be celebrated. At the back is a painting on the wall, very
163 similar to that in Agellius's cottage. The ever-blessed immaculate Mother of God is
164 exercising her office as the Advocate of sinners, standing by the sacrifice as she stood

165 at the cross itself, and offering up and applying its infinite merits and incommunicable
166 virtue in union with priest and people. So instinctive in the Christian mind is the principle
167 of decoration, as it may be called, that even in times of suffering, and places of
168 banishment, we see it brought into exercise. Not only is the arch which overspans the
169 altar ornamented with an arabesque pattern, but the roof or vault is coloured with
170 paintings. Our Lord is in the centre, with two figures of Moses on each side, on the right
171 unloosing his sandals, on the left striking the rock. Between the centre figure and the
172 altar may be seen the raising of Lazarus; in the opposite partition the healing of the
173 paralytic; at the four angles are men and women alternately in the attitude of prayer.

174 At this time the altar-stone was covered with a rich crimson silk, with figures of St. Peter
175 and St. Paul worked in gold upon it, the gift of a pious lady of Carthage. Beyond the
176 altar, but not touching it, was a cross; and on one side of the altar a sort of basin
177 or *piscina* cut in the rock, with a linen cloth hanging up against it. There were no candles
178 upon the altar itself, but wax lights fixed into silver stands were placed at intervals along
179 the edge of the presbytery or elevation.

180 The mass was in behalf of the confessors for the {339} faith then in prison in Carthage;
181 and the sacred ministers, some half-hour after Agellius's entrance, made their
182 appearance. Their vestments already varied somewhat from the ordinary garments of
183 the day, and bespoke antiquity; and, though not so simply *sui generis* as they are now,
184 they were so far special, that they were never used on any other occasion, but were
185 reserved for the sacred service. The neck was bare, the amice being as yet unknown;
186 instead of the stole was what was called the *orarium*, a sort of handkerchief resting on
187 the shoulders, and falling down on each side. The alb had been the inner garment,
188 or *camisium*, which in civil use was retained at night when the other garments were
189 thrown off; and, as at the present day, it was confined round the waist by a zone or
190 girdle. The maniple was a napkin, supplying the place of a handkerchief; and the
191 chasuble was an ample *pænula*, such as was worn by the judges, a cloak enveloping
192 the whole person round, when spread out, with an opening in the centre, through which
193 the head might pass. The deacon's dalmatic was much longer than it is now, and the
194 subdeacon's tunic resembled the alb. All the vestments were of the purest white.

195 The mass began by the bishop giving his blessing; and then the Lector, a man of
196 venerable age, taking the roll called *Lectionarium*, and proceeding to a pulpit, read the
197 Prophets to the people, much in the way observed among ourselves still on holy
198 Saturday and the vigil of Pentecost. These being finished, the people chanted the first
199 verse of the *Gloria Patri*, {340} after which the clergy alternated with the people
200 the *Kyrie*, pretty much as the custom is now.

201 Here a fresh roll was brought to the Lector, then or afterwards called *Apostolus*, from
202 which he read one of the canonical epistles. A psalm followed, which was sung by the
203 people; and, after this, the Lector received the *Evangeliarium*, and read a portion of the
204 Gospel, at which lights were lighted, and the people stood. When he had finished, the
205 Lector opened the roll wide, and, turning round, presented it to bishop, clergy, and
206 people to kiss.

207 The deacon then cried out, "Ite in pace, catechumeni," "Depart in peace, catechumens;"
208 and then the kiss of peace was passed round, and the people began to sing some
209 psalms or hymns. While they were so engaged, the deacon received from the acolyte
210 the *sindon*, or corporal, which was of the length of the altar, and perhaps of greater
211 breadth, and spread it upon the sacred table. Next was placed on the *sindon* the *oblata*,
212 that is, the small loaves, according to the number of communicants, with the paten,
213 which was large, and a gold chalice, duly prepared. And then the *sindon*, or corporal,
214 was turned back over them, to cover them as a pall.

215 The celebrant then advanced: he stood at the further side of the altar, where the
216 candles are now, with his face to the people, and then began the holy sacrifice. First he
217 incensed the *oblata*, that is, the loaves and chalice, as an acknowledgment of God's
218 sovereign dominion, and as a token of uplifted prayer {341} to Him. Then the roll of
219 prayers was brought him, while the deacon began what is sometimes called the bidding
220 prayer, being a catalogue of the various subjects for which intercession is to be made,
221 after the manner of the *Oremus dilectissimi*, now used on Good Friday. This catalogue
222 included all conditions of men, the conversion of the world, the exaltation of Holy
223 Church, the maintenance of the Roman empire, the due ripening and gathering of the
224 fruits of the earth, and other spiritual and temporal blessings,—subjects very much the
225 same as those which are now called the Pope's intentions. The prayers ended with a
226 special reference to those present, that they might persevere in the Lord even to the
227 end. And then the priest began the *Sursum corda*, and said the *Sanctus*.

228 The Canon or *Actio* seems to have run, in all but a few words, as it does now, and the
229 solemn words of consecration were said secretly. Great stress was laid on the Lord's
230 prayer, which in one sense terminated the function. It was said aloud by the people, and
231 when they said, "Forgive us our trespasses," they beat their breasts.

232 It is not wonderful that Agellius, assisting for almost the first time at this wonderful
233 solemnity, should have noted everything as it occurred; and we must be considered as
234 giving our account of it from his mouth.

235 It needs not to enlarge on the joy of the meeting which followed between Cæcilius and
236 his young penitent. {342} "O my father," he said, "I come to thee, never to leave thee, to
237 be thy dutiful servant, and to be trained by thee after the pattern of Him who made thee
238 what thou art. Wonderful things have happened; Callista is in prison on the charge of
239 Christianity; I was in a sort of prison myself, or what was worse for my soul; and Juba,
240 my brother, in the strangest of ways, has this morning let me out. Shall she not be
241 saved, my father, in God's own way, as well as I? At least we can all pray for her; but
242 surely we can do more—so precious a soul must not be left to herself and the world. If
243 she has the trials, she may claim the blessings of a Christian. Is she to go back to
244 heathenism? Is she, alas! to suffer without baptism? Shall we not hazard death to
245 bestow on her that grace?"

Chapter 31. The Baptism

246 {343} WE have already had occasion to mention that there were many secret well-
247 wishers, or at least protectors, of Christians, as in the world at large, so also in Sicca.
248 There were many persons who had received benefits from their charity, and had
249 experience of the scandalous falsehood of the charges now circulated against them.
250 Others would feel a generosity towards a cruelly persecuted body; others, utterly dead
251 to the subject of religion, or rather believing all religions to be impostures, would not
252 allow it to be assumed that only one was worthy of bad treatment. Others liked what
253 they heard of the religion itself, and thought there was truth in it, though it had no claim
254 to a monopoly of truth. Others felt it to be true, but shrank from the consequences of
255 openly embracing it. Others, who had apostatised through fear of the executioner,
256 intended to come back to it at the last. It must be added that in the African Church
257 confessors in prison had, or were considered to have, the remarkable privilege of
258 gaining the public forgiveness of the Church for those who had lapsed; it was an object,
259 then, for all those {344} who, being in that miserable case, wished some day to be
260 restored, to gain their promise of assistance, or their good-will. To these reasons was
261 added, in Callista's case, the interest which naturally attached to a woman, young and
262 defenceless.

263 The burning sun of Africa is at the height of its power. The population is prostrated by
264 heat, by scarcity, by pestilence, and by the decimation which their riot brought upon
265 them. They care neither for Christianity, nor for anything else just now. They lie in the
266 porticoes, in the caverns under the city, in the baths. They are more alive at night. The
267 apparitor, in whose dwelling Callista was lodged, who was himself once a Christian, lies
268 in the shade of the great doorway, into which his rooms open, asleep, or stupefied. Two
269 men make their appearance about two hours before sunset, and demand admittance to
270 Callista. The jailor asks if they are not the two Greeks, her brother and the rhetorician,
271 who had visited her before. The junior of the strangers drops a purse heavy with coin
272 into his lap, and passes on with his companion. When the mind is intent on great
273 subjects or aims, heat and cold, hunger and thirst, lose their power of enfeebling it; thus
274 perhaps we must account for the energy now displayed both by the two ecclesiastics
275 and by Callista herself.

276 She too thought it was the unwelcome philosopher come again; she gave a start and a
277 cry of delight when she saw it was Cæcilius. "My father," she said, "I want to be a
278 Christian, if I may; He came to {345} save the lost sheep. I have learnt such things from
279 this book—let me give it you while I can. I am not long for this world. Give me Him who
280 spoke so kindly to that woman. Take from me my load of sin, and then I will gladly go."
281 She knelt at his feet, and gave the roll of parchment into his hand.

282 "Rise and sit," he answered. "Let us think calmly over the matter."

283 "I am ready," she insisted. "Deny me not my wish, when time is so urgent—if I may have
284 it."

285 "Sit down calmly," he said again; "I am not refusing you, but I wish to know about you."
286 He could hardly keep from tears, of pain, or of joy, or of both, when he saw the great

287 change which trial had wrought in her. What touched him most was the utter
288 disappearance of that majesty of mien, which once was hers, a gift, so beautiful, so
289 unsuitable to fallen man. There was instead of it a frank humility, a simplicity without
290 concealment, an unresisting meekness, which seemed as if it would enable her, if
291 trampled on, to smile and to kiss the feet that insulted her. She had lost every vestige of
292 what the world worships under the titles of proper pride and self-respect. Callista was
293 now living, not in the thought of herself, but of Another.

294 "God has been very good to you," he continued; "but in the volume you have returned to
295 me He bids us 'reckon the charges.' Can you drink of His chalice? Recollect what is
296 before you."

297 She still continued kneeling, with a touching earnestness {346} of face and demeanour,
298 and with her hands crossed upon her breast.

299 "I *have* reckoned," she replied; "heaven and hell: I prefer heaven."

300 "You are on earth," said Cæcilius; "not in heaven or hell. You must bear the pangs of
301 earth before you drink the blessedness of heaven."

302 "He has given me the firm purpose," she said, "to gain heaven, to escape hell; and He
303 will give me too the power."

304 "Ah, Callista!" he answered, in a voice broken with distress, "you know not what you will
305 have to bear, if you join yourself to Him."

306 "He has done great things for me already; I am wonderfully changed; I am not what I
307 was. He will do more still."

308 "Alas, my child!" said Cæcilius, "that feeble frame, ah! how will it bear the strong iron, or
309 the keen flame, or the ruthless beast? My child, what do I feel, who am free, thus
310 handing you over to be the sport of the evil one?"

311 "Father, I have chosen Him," she answered, "not hastily, but on deliberation. I believe
312 Him most absolutely. Keep me not from Him; give Him to me, if I may ask it; give me my
313 Love."

314 Presently she added, "I have never forgotten those words of yours since you used them;
315 'Amor meus crucifixus est.'"

316 She began again, "I will be a Christian; give me my place among them. Give me my
317 place at the {347} feet of Jesus, Son of Mary, my God. I wish to love Him. I think I can
318 love Him. Make me His."

319 "He has loved you from eternity," said Cæcilius, and, therefore, you are now beginning
320 to love Him."

321 She covered her eyes with her hands, and remained in profound meditation. "I am very
322 ignorant—very sinful," she said at length; "but one thing I know, that there is but One to
323 love in the whole world, and I wish to love him. I surrender myself to Him, if He will take
324 me; and He shall teach me about Himself."

325 "The angry multitude, their fierce voices, the brutal executioner, the prison, the torture,
326 the slow, painful death." He was speaking, not to her, but to himself. She was calm, in
327 spite of her fervour; but he could not contain himself. His heart melted within him; he felt
328 like Abraham, lifting up his hand to slay his child.

329 "Time passes," she said; "what may happen? you may be discovered. But, perhaps,"
330 she added, suddenly changing her tone, "it is a matter of long initiation, Woe is me!"

331 "We must gird ourselves to the work, Victor," he said to his deacon who was with him.
332 Cæcilius fell back and sat down, and Victor came forward. He formally instructed her so
333 far as the circumstances allowed. Not for baptism only, but for confirmation, and Holy
334 Eucharist; for Cæcilius determined to give her all three sacraments at once.

335 It was a sight for angels to look down upon, and {348} they did; when the poor child, rich
336 in this world's gifts, but poor in those of eternity, knelt down to receive that sacred
337 stream upon her brow, which fell upon her with almost sensible sweetness, and
338 suddenly produced a serenity different in kind from anything she had ever before even
339 had the power of conceiving.

340 The bishop gave her confirmation, and then the Holy Eucharist. It was her first and last
341 communion; in a few days she renewed it, or rather completed it, under the very Face
342 and Form of Him whom she now believed without seeing.

343 "Farewell, my dearest of children," said Cæcilius, "till the hour when we both meet
344 before the throne of God. A few sharp pangs which you can count and measure, and all
345 will be well. You will be carried through joyously, and like a conqueror. I know it. You
346 could face the prospect before you were a Christian, and you will be equal to the actual
347 trial, now that you are."

348 "Never fear me, father," she said in a clear, low voice. The bishop and his deacon left
349 the prison.

350 The sun had all but set, when Cæcilius and Victor passed the city gate; and it was more
351 than twilight as they crossed the wild hills leading to the precipitous pass. Evil men were
352 not their only peril in this work of charity. They were also in danger from wild beasts in
353 these lone wastes, and, the heathen would have added, from bad spirits. Bad spirits
354 Cæcilius {349} recognised too; but he would not have granted that they were perilous.
355 The two went forward, saying prayers lowly, and singing psalms, when a sudden cry
356 was heard, and a strong tall form rushed past them. It might be some robber of the wild,
357 or dangerous outcast, or savage fanatic, who knew and hated their religion; however,
358 while they stopped and looked, he had come, and he was gone. But he came again,

359 more slowly; and from his remarkable shape Cæcilius saw that it was the brother of
360 Agellius. He said, "Juba;" Juba started back, and stood at a distance. Cæcilius held out
361 his hand, and called him on, again mentioning his name. The poor fellow came nearer:
362 Cæcilius's day's work was not at an end.

363 Since we last heard of him, Juba had dwelt in the mountainous tract over which the two
364 Christians were now passing; roaming to and fro, or beating himself in idle fury against
365 the adamantine rocks, and fighting with the stern necessity of the elements. How he
366 was sustained can hardly be guessed, unless the impulse, which led him on the first
367 accession of his fearful malady, to fly upon the beasts of the desert, served him here
368 also. Roots too and fruits were scattered over the wild; and still more so in the ravines,
369 wherever any quantity of soil had been accumulated. Alas! had the daylight lasted, in
370 him too, as well as in Callista, Cæcilius would have found changes, but of a very
371 different nature; yet even in him he would have seen a change for the better, for that old
372 awful expression of pride and defiance was gone. What {350} was the use of parading a
373 self-will, which every moment of his life belied? His actions, his words, his hands, his
374 lips, his feet, his place of abode, his daily course, were in the dominion of another, who
375 inexorably ruled him. It was not the gentle influence which draws and persuades; it was
376 not the power which can be propitiated by prayer; it was a tyranny which acted without
377 reaction, energetic as mind, and impenetrable as matter.

378 "Juba," said Cæcilius a third time. The maniac came nearer, and then again suddenly
379 retreated. He stood at a short distance from Cæcilius, as if afraid to come on, and cried
380 out, tossing his hands wildly, "Away, black hypocrite, come not near me! Away! hound
381 of a priest, cross not my path, lest I tear you to shreds!" Such visitations were no
382 novelties to Cæcilius; he raised his hand and made the sign of the cross, then he said,
383 "Come." Juba advanced, shrieked, and used some terrible words, and rushed upon
384 Cæcilius, as if he would treat him as he had treated the savage wolf. "Come?" he cried,
385 "yes, I come!" and Victor ran up, fearing his teeth would be in Cæcilius's throat, if he
386 delayed longer. The latter stood his ground, quailing neither in eye nor in limb; he made
387 the sign of the cross a second time; and in spite of a manifest antagonism within him,
388 the stricken youth, with horrid cries, came dancing after him.

389 Thus they proceeded, with some signs of insurrection from time to time on Juba's part,
390 but with a {351} successful reduction of it as often on the part of Cæcilius, till they got to
391 the ascent by the olive-trees, where careful walking was necessary. Then Cæcilius
392 turned round, and beckoned him. He came. He said, "Kneel down." He knelt down.
393 Cæcilius put his hand on his head, saying to him, "Follow me close and without any
394 disturbance." The three pursued their journey, and all arrived safe at the cavern. There
395 Cæcilius gave Juba in charge to Romanus, who had been intrusted with
396 the *energumens* at Carthage.

Chapter 32. The Imperial Rescript

397 {352} HAD the imperial edict been acted on by the magistrates of Sicca, without a
398 reference to Carthage, it is not easy to suppose that Callista would have persevered in

399 her refusal to commit the act of idolatry required of her. But, to speak of second causes,
400 the hesitation of her judges was her salvation. Once baptised, there was no reason she
401 should desire any further delay of her conflict. Come it must, and come it did. While
402 Cæcilius was placing her beyond danger, the rescript of the Proconsul had been
403 received at the office of the Duumvirs.

404 The absence of the Proconsul from Carthage had been the cause of the delay; and
405 then, some investigation was needed to understand the relation of Callista's seizure to
406 the riot on the one hand, and to the strong act of the military on the other, in quelling it.
407 It was thought that something or other might come to light to account for the anomalous
408 and unaccountable position which she had taken up. The imperial government
409 considered it had now a clear view of her case, and its orders were distinct and
410 peremptory. Christianity was to cease to be. It was a subtle foe, {353} sapping the vitals
411 of the state. Rome must perish, or this illegal association. Such evasions as Callista had
412 used were but instances of its craft. Its treason lay, not in its being Christianity, but in its
413 not sacrificing to the gods of Rome. Callista was but throwing dust in their eyes. There
414 had been no blow struck against the treason in inland Africa. Women had often been
415 the most dangerous of conspirators. As she was a stranger, there was more probability
416 of her connection with secret societies, and also less inconvenience in her execution.
417 Whatever happened, she was to be got rid of; but first her resolution was to be broken,
418 for the sake of the example. First, let her be brought before the tribunal and threatened;
419 then thrust into the Tullianum; then put upon the rack, and returned to prison; then
420 scorched over a slow fire; last of all, beheaded, and left for beasts of prey. She would
421 sacrifice ere the last stage was reached. When she had given way, let her be given up
422 to the gladiators. The message ended by saying that the Proconsular Procurator, who
423 came by the same carriages, would preside at the process.

424 O wisdom of the world! and strength of the world! what are you when matched beside
425 the foolishness and the weakness of the Christian? You are great in resources, manifold
426 in methods, hopeful in prospects; but one thing you have not,—and that is peace. You
427 are always tumultuous, restless, apprehensive. You have nothing you can rely upon.
428 You have no rock under your feet. But the humblest, feeblest Christian {354} has that
429 which is impossible to you. Callista had once felt the misery of maladies akin to yours.
430 She had passed through doubt, anxiety, perplexity, despondency, passion; but now she
431 was in peace. Now she feared the torture or the flame as little as the breeze which
432 arose at nightfall, or the busy chatter of the grasshoppers at the noonday. Nay, rather,
433 she did not think of torture and death at all, but was possessed by a peace which bore
434 her up, as if bodily, on its mighty wings. For hours she remained on her knees, after
435 Cæcilius left her: then she lay down on her rushes and slept her last sleep.

436 She slept sound; she dreamed. She thought she was no longer in Africa, but in her own
437 Greece, more sunny and bright than before; but the inhabitants were gone. Its majestic
438 mountains, its rich plains, its expanse of waters, all silent: no one to converse with, no
439 one to sympathize with. And, as she wandered on and wondered, suddenly its face
440 changed, and its colours were illuminated tenfold by a heavenly glory, and each hue
441 upon the scene was of a beauty she had never known, and seemed strangely to affect

442 all her senses at once, being fragrance and music, as well as light. And there came out
443 of the grottoes and glens and woods, and out of the seas, myriads of bright images,
444 whose forms she could not discern; and these came all around her, and became a sort
445 of scene or landscape, which she could not have described in words, as if it were a
446 world of spirits, not of matter. And as she gazed, she thought she saw before her a
447 {355} well-known face, only glorified. She, who had been a slave, now was arrayed
448 more brilliantly than an oriental queen; and she looked at Callista with a smile so sweet,
449 that Callista felt she could but dance to it.

450 And as she looked more earnestly, doubting whether she should begin or not, the face
451 changed, and now was more marvellous still. It had an innocence in its look, and also a
452 tenderness, which bespoke both Maid and Mother, and so transported Callista, that she
453 must needs advance towards her, out of love and reverence. And the lady seemed to
454 make signs of encouragement: so she began a solemn measure, unlike all dances of
455 earth, with hands and feet, serenely moving on towards what she heard some of them
456 call a great action and a glorious consummation, though she did not know what they
457 meant. At length she was fain to sing as well as dance; and her words were, "In the
458 name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;" on which another said, "A
459 good beginning of the sacrifice." And when she had come close to this gracious figure,
460 there was a fresh change. The face, the features were the same; but the light of Divinity
461 now seemed to beam through them, and the hair parted, and hung down long on each
462 side of the forehead; and there was a crown of another fashion than the Lady's round
463 about it, made of what looked like thorns. And the palms of the hands were spread out
464 as if towards her, and there were marks of wounds in them. And the {356} vestment had
465 fallen, and there was a deep opening in the side. And as she stood entranced before
466 Him, and motionless, she felt a consciousness that her own palms were pierced like
467 His, and her feet also. And she looked round, and saw the likeness of His face and of
468 His wounds upon all that company. And now they were suddenly moving on, and
469 bearing something or some one, heavenwards; and they too began to sing, and their
470 words seemed to be, "Rejoice with Me, for I have found My sheep," ever repeated. They
471 went up through an avenue or long grotto, with torches of diamonds, and amethysts,
472 and sapphires, which lit up its spars and made them sparkle. And she tried to look, but
473 could not discover what they were carrying, till she heard a very piercing cry, which
474 awoke her.