

Chapter 23. Gurta

{256} IN the bosom of the woods which stretched for many miles from the immediate environs of Sicca, and placed on a gravel slope reaching down to a brook, which ran in a bottom close by, was a small, rude hut, of a kind peculiar to Africa, and commonly ascribed to the wandering tribes, who neither cared, nor had leisure for a more stable habitation. Some might have called it a tent, from the goat's-hair cloth with which it was covered; but it looked, as to shape, like nothing else than an inverted boat, or the roof of a house set upon the ground. Inside it was seen to be constructed of the branches of trees, twisted together or wattled, the interstices, or rather the whole surface, being covered with clay. Being thus stoutly built, lined, and covered, it was proof against the tremendous rains, to which the climate, for which it was made, was subject. Along the centre ridge or backbone, which varied in height from six to ten feet from the ground, it was supported by three posts or pillars; at one end it rose conically to an open aperture, which served for chimney, for sky-light, and for ventilator. Hooks were suspended from the roof for {257} baskets, articles of clothing, weapons, and implements of various kinds; and a second cone, excavated in the ground with the vertex downward, served as a storehouse for grain. The door was so low, that an ordinary person must bend double to pass through it.

However, it was in the winter months only, when the rains were profuse, that the owner of this respectable mansion condescended to creep into it. In summer she had a drawing-room, as it may be called, of nature's own creation, in which she lived, and in one quarter of which she had her lair. Close above the hut was a high plot of level turf, surrounded by old oaks, and fringed beneath with thick underwood. In the centre of this green rose a yew-tree of primeval character. Indeed, the whole forest spoke of the very beginnings of the world, as if it had been the immediate creation of that Voice which bade the earth clothe itself with green life. But the place no longer spoke exclusively of its Maker. Upon the trees hung the emblems and objects of idolatry, and the turf was traced with magical characters. Littered about were human bones, horns of wild animals, wax figures, spermaceti taken from vaults, large nails, to which portions of flesh adhered, as if they had had to do with malefactors, metal plates engraved with strange characters, bottled blood, hair of young persons, and old rags. The reader must not suppose any incantation is about to follow, or that the place we are describing will have a prominent place in what remains of our tale; but even if it be the scene of only {258} one conversation, and one event, there is no harm in describing it, as it appeared on that occasion.

The old crone, who was seated in this bower of delight, had an expression of countenance in keeping, not with the place, but with the furniture with which it was adorned; that furniture told her trade. Whether the root of superstition might be traced deeper still, and the woman and her traps were really and directly connected with the powers beneath the earth, it is impossible to determine; it is certain she had the will, it is certain that that will was from their inspiration; nay, it is certain that she thought she really possessed the communications which she desired; it is certain, too, she so far deceived herself as to fancy that what she learned by mere natural means came to her

43 from a diabolical source. She kept up an active correspondence with Sicca. She was
44 consulted by numbers; she was up with the public news, the social gossip, and the
45 private and secret transactions of the hour; and had, before now, even interfered in
46 matters of state, and had been courted by rival political parties. But in the high cares
47 and occupations of this interesting person, we are not here concerned; but with a
48 conversation which took place between her and Juba, about the same hour of the
49 evening as that of Cæcilius's escape, but on the day after it, while the sun was gleaming
50 almost horizontally through the tall trunks of the trees of the forest.

51 "Well, my precious boy," said the old woman, {259} "the choicest gifts of great Cham be
52 your portion! You had excellent sport yesterday, I'll warrant. The rats squeaked, oh? and
53 you beat the life out of them. That scoundrel sacristan, I suppose, has taken up his
54 quarters below."

55 "You may say it," answered Juba. "The reptile! he turned right about, and would have
56 made himself an honest fellow, when it couldn't be helped."

57 "Good, good!" returned Gurta, as if she had got something very pleasant in her mouth;
58 "ah! that is good! but he did not escape on that score, I do trust."

59 "They pulled him to pieces all the more cheerfully," said Juba.

60 Pulled him to pieces, limb by limb, joint by joint, eh?" answered Gurta. "Did they skin
61 him?—did they do anything to his eyes, or his tongue? Anyhow, it was too quickly,
62 Juba. Slowly, leisurely, gradually. Yes, it's like a glutton to be quick about it. Taste him,
63 handle him, play with him,—that's luxury! but to bolt him,—faugh!"

64 "Cæso's slave made a good end," said Juba: "he stood up for his views, and died like a
65 man."

66 "The gods smite him! but he has gone up—up:" and she laughed. "Up to what they call
67 bliss and glory;—such glory! but he's out of our domain, you know. But he did not die
68 easy?"

69 "The boys worried him a good deal," answered Juba: "but it's not quite in my line,
70 mother, all this. I think you drink a pint of blood morning and evening, {260} and thrive
71 on it, old woman. It makes you merry; but it's too much for my stomach."

72 "Ha, ha, my boy!" cried Gurta; "you'll improve in time, though you make wry faces, now
73 that you're young. Well, and have you brought me any news from the capitol? Is any
74 one getting a rise in the world, or a downfall? How blows the wind? Are there changes
75 in the camp? This Decius, I suspect, will not last long."

76 "They all seem desperately frightened," said Juba, "lest they should not smite your
77 friends hard enough, Gurta. Root and branch is the word. They'll have to make a few
78 Christians for the occasion, in order to kill them: and I almost think they're about it," he

79 added, thoughtfully. "They have to show that they are not surpassed by the rabble. 'Tis
80 a pity Christians are so few, isn't it, mother?"

81 "Yes, yes," she said, "but we must crush them, grind them, many or few: and we shall,
82 we shall! Callista's to come."

83 "I don't see they are worse than other people," said Juba; "not at all, except that they
84 are commonly sneaks. If Callista turns, why should not I turn too, mother, to keep her
85 company, and keep your hand in?"

86 "No, no, my boy," returned the witch, "you must serve my master. You are having your
87 fling just now, but you will buckle to in good time. You must one day take some work
88 with my merry men. Come here, child," said the fond mother, "and let me kiss you."
89 {261}

90 "Keep your kisses for your monkeys and goats and cats," answered Juba; "they're not to
91 my taste, old dame. Master! my master! I won't have a master! I'll be nobody's servant.
92 I'll never stand to be hired, nor cringe to a bully, nor quake before a rod. Please
93 yourself, Gurta; I am a free man. You're my mother by courtesy only."

94 Gurta looked at him savagely. "Why, you're not going to be pious and virtuous, Juba? A
95 choice saint you'll make! You shall be drawn for a picture."

96 "Why shouldn't I, if I choose?" said Juba. "If I must take service, willy nilly, I'd any day
97 prefer the other's to that of your friend. I've not left the master to take the man."

98 "Blaspheme not the great gods," she answered, "or they'll do you a mischief yet."

99 "I say again," insisted Juba, "if I must lick the earth, it shall not be where your friend has
100 trod. It shall be in my brother's fashion, rather than in yours, Gurta."

101 "Agellius!" she shrieked out with such disgust, that it is wonderful she uttered the name
102 at all. "Ah! you have not told me about him, boy. Well, is he safe in the pit, or in the
103 stomach of an hyena?"

104 "He's alive," said Juba; "but he has not got it in him to be a Christian. Yes, he's safe with
105 his uncle."

106 "Ah! Jucundus must ruin him, debauch him, and then we must make away with him. We
107 must not be in a hurry," said Gurta, "it must be body and soul." {262}

108 "No one shall touch him, craven as he is," answered Juba. "I despise him, but let him
109 alone."

110 "Don't come across me," said Gurta, sullenly; "I'll have my way. Why, you know I could
111 smite you to the dust, as well as him, if I chose."

112 "But you have not asked me about Callista," answered Juba. "It is really a capital joke,
113 but she has got into prison for certain, for being a Christian. Fancy it! they caught her in
114 the streets, and put her in the guard-house, and have had her up for examination. You
115 see they want a Christian for the nonce: it would not do to have none such in prison; so
116 they will flourish with her till Decius bolts from the scene."

117 "The Furies have her!" cried Gurta: "she *is* a Christian, my boy: I told you so, long ago!"

118 "Callista a Christian!" answered Juba, "ha! ha! She and Agellius are going to make a
119 match of it, of some sort or other. They're thinking of other things than paradise."

120 "She and the old priest, more likely, more likely," said Gurta. "He's in prison with her—in
121 the pit, as I trust."

122 "Your master has cheated you for once, old woman," said Juba.

123 Gurta looked at him fiercely, and seemed waiting for his explanation. He began
124 singing,—

125 "She wheedled and coaxed, but he was no fool;
126 He'd be his own master, he'd not be her tool;
127 Not the little black moor should send him to school. {263}

128 "She foamed and she cursed—'twas the same thing to him;
129 She laid well her trap; but he carried his whim;—
130 The priest scuffled off, safe in life and in limb."

131 Gurta was almost suffocated with passion. "Cyprianus has not escaped, boy?" she
132 asked at length.

133 "I got him off," said Juba, undauntedly.

134 A shade, as of Erebus, passed over the witch's face; but she remained quite silent.

135 "Mother, I am my own master," he continued, "I must break your assumption of
136 superiority. I'm not a boy, though you call me so. I'll have my own way. Yes, I saved
137 Cyprianus. You're a bloodthirsty old hag! Yes, I've seen your secret doings. Did not I
138 catch you the other day, practising on that little child? You had nailed him up by hands
139 and feet against the tree, and were cutting him to pieces at your leisure, as he quivered
140 and shrieked the while. You were examining or using his liver for some of your black
141 purposes. It's not in my line; but you gloated over it; and when he wailed, you wailed in
142 mimicry. You were panting with pleasure."

143 Gurta was still silent, and had an expression on her face, awful from the intensity of its
144 malignity. She had uttered a low piercing whistle.

145 "Yes!" continued Juba, "you revelled in it. You chattered to the poor babe when it
146 screamed, as a nurse to an infant. You called it pretty names, and squeaked out your
147 satisfaction each time you stuck it. You old hag! I'm not of your breed, though they call
148 us of kin. / don't fear you," he said, {264} observing the expression of her countenance, I
149 don't fear the immortal devil!" And he continued his song—

150 "She beckoned the moon, and the moon came down;
151 The green earth shrivelled beneath her frown;
152 But a man's strong will can keep his own."

153 While he was talking and singing, her call had been answered from the hut. An animal
154 of some wonderful species had crept out of it, and proceeded to creep and crawl,
155 moeing and twisting as it went, along the trees and shrubs which rounded the grass
156 plot. When it came up to the old woman, it crouched at her feet, and then rose up upon
157 its hind legs and begged. She took hold of the uncouth beast and began to fondle it in
158 her arms, muttering something in its ear. At length, when Juba stopped for a moment in
159 his song, she suddenly flung it right at him, with great force, saying, "Take that!" She
160 then gave utterance to a low inward laugh, and leaned herself back against the trunk of
161 the tree upon which she was sitting, with her knees drawn up almost to her chin.

162 The blow seemed to act on Juba as a shock on his nervous system, both from its
163 violence and its strangeness. He stood still for a moment, and then, without saying a
164 word, he turned away, and walked slowly down the hill, as if in a maze. Then he sat
165 down ...

166 In an instant up he started again with a great cry, and began running at the top of his
167 speed. He thought he heard a voice speaking in him; and, however {265} fast he ran,
168 the voice, or whatever it was, kept up with him. He rushed through the underwood,
169 trampling and crushing it under his feet, and scaring the birds and small game which
170 lodged there. At last, exhausted, he stood still for breath, when he heard it say loudly
171 and deeply, as if speaking with his own organs, "You cannot escape from yourself !"
172 Then a terror seized him; he fell down and fainted away.

Chapter 24. A Mother's Blessing

173 {266} WHEN his senses returned, his first impression was of something in him not
174 himself. He felt it in his breathing; he tasted it in his mouth. The brook which ran by
175 Gurta's encampment had by this time become a streamlet, though still shallow. He
176 plunged into it; a feeling came upon him as if he ought to drown himself, had it been
177 deeper. He rolled about in it, in spite of its flinty and rocky bed. When he came out of it,
178 his tunic sticking to him, he tore it off his shoulders, and let it hang round his girdle in
179 shreds, as it might. The shock of the water, however, acted as a sedative upon him, and
180 the coolness of the night refreshed him. He walked on for a while in silence.

181 Suddenly the power within him began uttering, by means of his organs of speech, the
182 most fearful blasphemies, words embodying conceptions which, had they come into his

183 mind, he might indeed have borne with patience before this, or uttered in bravado, but
184 which now filled him with inexpressible loathing, and a terror to which he had hitherto
185 been quite a stranger. He had always in his heart believed in a God, but he now
186 believed with a reality and intensity {267} utterly new to him. He felt it as if he saw Him;
187 he felt there was a world of good and evil beings. He did not love the good, or hate the
188 evil; but he shrank from the one, and he was terrified at the other; and he felt himself
189 carried away, against his will, as the prey of some dreadful, mysterious power, which
190 tyrannised over him.

191 The day had closed—the moon had risen. He plunged into the thickest wood, and the
192 trees seemed to him to make way for him. Still they seemed to moan and to creak as
193 they moved out of their place. Soon he began to see that they were looking at him, and
194 exulting over his misery. They, of an inferior nature, had had no gift which they could
195 abuse and lose; and they remained in that honour and perfection in which they were
196 created. Birds of the night flew out of them, reptiles slunk away; yet soon he began to
197 be surrounded, wherever he went, by a circle of owls, bats, ravens, crows, snakes, wild
198 cats, and apes, which were always looking at him, but somehow made way, retreating
199 before him, and yet forming again, and in order, as he marched along.

200 He had passed through the wing of the forest which he had entered, and penetrated into
201 the more mountainous country. He ascended the heights; he was a taller, stronger man
202 than he had been; he went forward with a preternatural vigour, and flourished his arms
203 with the excitement of some vinous or gaseous intoxication. He heard the roar of the
204 wild beasts echoed along the woody ravines {268} which were out into the solid
205 mountain rock, with a reckless feeling, as if he could cope with them. As he passed the
206 dens of the lion, leopard, hyena, jackal, wild boar, and wolf, there he saw them sitting at
207 the entrance, or stopping suddenly as they prowled along, and eyeing him, but not
208 daring to approach. He strode along from rock to rock, and over precipices, with the
209 certainty and ease of some giant in Eastern fable. Suddenly a beast of prey came
210 across him; in a moment he had torn up by the roots the stump of a wild vine plant,
211 which was near him; had thrown himself upon his foe before it could act on the
212 aggressive, had flung it upon its back, forced the weapon into its month, and was
213 stamping on its chest. He knocked the life out of the furious animal; and crying "Take
214 that," tore its flesh, and, applying his mouth to the wound, sucked a draught of its blood.

215 He has passed over the mountain, and has descended its side. Bristling shrubs,
216 swamps, precipitous banks, rushing torrents, are no obstacle to his course. He has
217 reached the brow of a hill, with a deep placid river at the foot of it, just as the dawn
218 begins to break. It is a lovely prospect, which every step he takes is becoming more
219 definite and more various in the daylight. Masses of oleander, of great beauty, with their
220 red blossoms, fringed the river, and tracked out its course into the distance. The bank of
221 the hill below him, and on the right and left, was a maze of fruit-trees, about which
222 nature, if it were not the hand of man, had had no thought except that they should be
223 {269} all together there. The wild olive, the pomegranate, the citron, the date, the
224 mulberry, the peach, the apple, and the walnut, formed a sort of spontaneous orchard.
225 Across the water, groves of palm-trees waved their long and graceful branches in the

226 morning breeze. The stately and solemn ilex, marshalled into long avenues, showed the
227 way to substantial granges or luxurious villas. The green turf or grass was spread out
228 beneath, and here and there flocks and herds were emerging out of the twilight, and
229 growing distinct upon the eye. Elsewhere the ground rose up into sudden eminences
230 crowned with chesnut woods, or with plantations of cedar and acacia, or wildernesses
231 of the cork-tree, the turpentine, the carooba, the white poplar, and the Phenician juniper,
232 while overhead ascended the clinging tendrils of the hop, and an underwood of myrtle
233 clothed their stems and roots. A profusion of wild flowers carpeted the ground far and
234 near.

235 Juba stood and gazed till the sun rose opposite to him, envying, repining, hating, like
236 Satan looking in upon Paradise. The wild mountains, or the locust-smitten track would
237 have better suited the tumult of his mind. It would have been a relief to him to have
238 retreated from so fair a scene, and to have retraced his steps, but he was not his own
239 master, and was hurried on. Sorely against his determined strong resolve and will,
240 crying out and protesting and shuddering, the youth was forced along into the fulness of
241 beauty and blessing with which he was so {270} little in tune. With rage and terror he
242 recognised that he had no part in his own movements, but was a mere slave. In spite of
243 himself he must go forward and behold a peace and sweetness which witnessed
244 against him. He dashed down through the thick grass, plunged into the water, and
245 without rest or respite began a second course of aimless toil and travail through the day.

246 The savage dogs of the villages howled and fled from him as he passed by; beasts of
247 burden, on their way to market, which he overtook or met, stood still, foamed and
248 trembled; the bright birds, the blue jay and golden oriole, hid themselves under the
249 leaves and grass; the storks, a religious and domestic bird, stopped their sharp
250 clattering note from the high tree or farmhouse turret, where they had placed their nests;
251 the very reptiles skulked away from his shadow, as if it were poisonous. The boors who
252 were at their labour in the fields suspended it, to look at one whom the Furies were
253 lashing and whirling on. Hour passed after hour, the sun attained its zenith, and then
254 declined, but this dreadful compulsory race continued. Oh, what would he have given
255 for one five minutes of oblivion, of slumber, of relief from the burning thirst which now
256 consumed him! but the master within him ruled his muscles and his joints, and the
257 intense pain of weariness had no concomitant prostration of strength. Suddenly he
258 began to laugh hideously; and he went forward dancing and singing loud, and playing
259 antics. He entered a {271} hovel, made faces at the children, till one of them fell into
260 convulsions, and he ran away with another; and when some country people pursued
261 him, he flung the child in their faces, saying, "Take that," and said he was Pentheus,
262 king of Thebes, of whom he had never heard, about to solemnise the orgies of Bacchus,
263 and he began to spout a chorus of Greek, a language he had never learnt or heard
264 spoken.

265 Now it is evening again, and he has come up to a village grove, where the rustics were
266 holding a feast in honour of Pan. The hideous brutal god, with yawning mouth, horned
267 head, and goat's feet, was placed in a rude shed, and a slaughtered lamb, decked with
268 flowers, lay at his feet. The peasants were frisking before him, boys and women, when

269 they were startled by the sight of a gaunt, wild, mysterious figure, which began to dance
270 too. He flung and capered about with such vigour that they ceased their sport to look on,
271 half with awe and half as a diversion. Suddenly he began to groan and to shriek, as if
272 contending with himself, and willing and not willing some new act; and the struggle
273 ended in his falling on his hands and knees, and crawling like a quadruped towards the
274 idol. When he got near, his attitude was still more servile; still groaning and shuddering,
275 he laid himself flat on the ground, and wriggled to the idol as a worm, and lapped up
276 with his tongue the mingled blood and dust which lay about the sacrifice. And then
277 again, as if nature had successfully asserted her own dignity, he jumped up {272} high
278 in the air, and, falling on the god, broke him to pieces, and scampered away out of
279 pursuit, before the lookers-on recovered from their surprise.

280 Another restless, fearful night amid the open country; ... but it seemed as if the worst
281 had passed, and, though still under the heavy chastisement of his pride, there was now
282 more in Juba of human action and of effectual will. The day broke, and he found himself
283 on the road to Sicca. The beautiful outline of the city was right before him. He passed
284 his brother's cottage and garden; it was a wreck. The trees torn up, the fences broken
285 down, and the room pillaged of the little that could be found there. He went on to the
286 city, crying out "Agellius;" the gate was open, and he entered. He went on to the Forum;
287 he crossed to the house of Jucundus; few people as yet were stirring in the place. He
288 looked up at the wall. Suddenly, by the help of projections, and other irregularities of the
289 brickwork, he mounted up upon the flat roof, and dropped down along the tiles, through
290 the *impluvium* into the middle of the house. He went softly into Agellius's closet, where
291 he was asleep, he roused him with the name of Callista, threw his tunic upon him, which
292 was by his side, put his boots into his hands, and silently beckoned him to follow him.
293 When he hesitated, he still whispered to him "Callista," and at length seized him and led
294 him on. He unbarred the street door, and with a movement of his arm, more like a blow
295 than a farewell, thrust him into the street. Then he barred again the {273} door upon
296 him, and lay down himself upon the bed which Agellius had left. His good Angel, we
297 may suppose, had gained a point in his favour, for he lay quiet, and fell into a heavy
298 sleep.

Chapter 25. Callista in Durance

299 {274} WE will hope that the reader, as well as Agellius, is attracted by the word Callista,
300 and wishes to know something about her fate; nay, perhaps finds fault with us as having
301 suffered him so long to content himself with the chance and second-hand information
302 which Jucundus or Juba has supplied. If we have been wanting in due consideration for
303 him, we now trust to make up for it.

304 When Callista, then, had so boldly left the cottage to stop the intruders, she had in one
305 important point reckoned without her host. She spoke Latin fluently, herself, and could
306 converse with the townspeople, most of whom could do the same; but it was otherwise
307 with the inhabitants of the country, numbers of whom, as we have said, were in Sicca
308 on the day of the outbreak. The two fellows, whom she went out to withstand, knew
309 neither her nor the Latin tongue. They were of a race which called itself Canaanite, and

310 really was so; huge, gigantic men, who looked like the sons of Enac, described in Holy
311 Writ. They knew nothing of roads or fences, and had scrambled up the hill as they
312 could, the shortest way, and, {275} being free from the crowd, with far more expedition
313 than had they followed the beaten track. She and they could not understand each
314 other's speech; but her appearance spoke for her, and, in consequence, they seized on
315 her as their share of the booty, and without more ado, carried her off towards Sicca. As
316 they came up by a route of their own, so they returned, and entered the city by a gate
317 more to the south, not the Septimian; a happy circumstance, as otherwise she would
318 have stood every chance of being destroyed in that wholesale massacre which the
319 soldiery inflicted on the crowd as it returned.

320 These giants, then, got possession of Callista, and she entered Sicca upon the shoulder
321 of one of them, who danced in with no greater inconvenience than if he was carrying on
322 it a basket of flowers, or a box of millinery. Here the party met with the city police, who
323 were stationed at the gate.

324 "Down with your live luggage, you rascals," they said, in their harsh Punic; "what have
325 you to do with plunder of this kind? and how came you by her?"

326 "She's one of those Christian rats, your worship," answered the fellow, who, strong as
327 he was, did not relish a contest with some dozen of armed men. "Long live the Emperor!
328 We'll teach her to eat asses' heads another time, and brew fevers. I found her with a
329 party of Christians. She's nothing but a witch, and she knows the consequences."

330 "Let her go, you drunken animal!" said the constable, still keeping his distance. "I'll
331 never believe {276} any woman is a Christian, let alone so young a one. And now I look
332 at her, so far as I can see by this light, I think she's priestess of one of the great temples
333 up there."

334 "She can turn herself into anything," said the other of her capturers, "young or old. I saw
335 her one night near Madaura, a month ago, in the tombs in the shape of a black cat."

336 "Away with you both, in the name of the Suffetes of Sicca and all the magistracy!" cried
337 the official. "Give up your prisoner to the authorities of the place, and let the law take its
338 course."

339 But the Canaanites did not seem disposed to give her up, and neither party liking to
340 attack the other, a compromise took place. "Well," said the guardian of the night, "the
341 law must be vindicated, and the peace preserved. My friends, you must submit to the
342 magistrates. But since she happens to be on your shoulder, my man, let her even
343 remain there, and we depute you, as a beast of burden, to carry her for us, thereby to
344 save us the trouble. Here, child," he continued, "you're our prisoner; so you shall plead
345 your own cause in the *popina* there. Long live Decius, pious and fortunate! Long live this
346 ancient city, colony and municipium! Cheer up, my lass, and sing us a stave or two, as
347 we go; for I'll pledge a *cyathus* of unmixed, that, if you choose, you can warble notes as
348 sweet as the manna gum."

349 Callista was silent, but she was perfectly collected, and ready to avail herself of any
350 opportunity to {277} better her condition. They went on towards the Forum, where a
351 police-office, as we now speak, was situated, but did not reach it without an adventure.
352 The Roman military force at Sicca was not more than a century of men; the greater
353 number were at this moment at the great gate, waiting for the mob; a few, in parties of
354 three and four, were patrolling the city. Several of these were at the entrance of the
355 Forum when the party came up to it; and it happened that a superior officer, who was an
356 assistant to what may be called the military resident of the place, a young man, on
357 whom much of the duty of the day had devolved, was with the soldiers. She had known
358 him as a friend of her brother's, and recognised him in the gloom, and at once took
359 advantage of the meeting.

360 "Help," she said, "gentlemen! help, Calphurnius! these rascals are carrying me off to
361 some den of their own."

362 The tribune at once knew her voice. "What!" he cried, with great astonishment, "what,
363 my pretty Greek! You most base, infamous, and unmannerly scoundrels, down with her
364 this instant! What have you to do with that young lady? You villains, unless you would
365 have me crack your African skulls with the hilt of my sword, down with her, I say!"

366 There was no resisting a Roman voice, but prompt obedience is a rarity, and the
367 ruffians began to parley. "My noble master," said the constable, "she's our prisoner.
368 Jove preserve you, and Bacchus and {278} Ceres bless you, my lord tribune! and long
369 life to the Emperor Decius in these bad times. But she is a rioter, my lord, one of the
370 ringleaders, and a Christian and a witch to boot."

371 "Cease your vile gutturals, you animal!" cried the officer, "or I will ram them down your
372 throat with my pike to digest them. Put down the lady, beast. Are you thinking twice
373 about it. Go, Lucius," he said to a private, "kick him away, and bring the woman here."

374 Callista was surrendered, but the fellow, sullen at the usage he had met with, and
375 spiteful against Calphurnius, as the cause of it, cried out maliciously, "Mind what you
376 are at, noble sir, it's not our affair; you can fry your own garlic. But an Emperor is an
377 Emperor, and an Edict is an Edict, and a Christian is a Christian; and I don't know what
378 high places will say to it, but it's your affair. Take notice," he continued, as he got to a
379 safer distance, raising his voice still higher, that the soldiers might hear, "yon girl is a
380 Christian priestess, caught in a Christian assembly, sacrificing asses and eating
381 children for the overthrow of the Emperor, and the ruin of his loyal city of Sicca, and I
382 have been interrupted in the discharge of my duty—I, a constable of the place. See
383 whether Calphurnius will not bring again upon us the plague, the murrain, the locusts,
384 and all manner of *larvæ* and *maniæ* before the end of the story."

385 This speech perplexed Calphurnius, as it was intended. It was impossible he could
386 dispose of Callista {279} as he wished, with such a charge formally uttered in the
387 presence of his men. He knew how serious the question of Christianity was at that
388 moment, and how determined the Imperial Government was on the eradication of its

389 professors; he was a good soldier, devoted to head-quarters, and had no wish to
390 compromise himself with his superiors, or to give by-standers an advantage over him,
391 by setting a prisoner at liberty without inquiry, who had been taken in a Christian's
392 house. He muttered an oath, and said to the soldiers, "Well, my lads, to the Triumviri
393 with her, since it must be so. Cheer up, my star of the morning, bright beam of Hellas, it
394 is only as a matter of form, and you will be set at liberty as soon as they look on you."
395 And with these words he led the way to the *Officium*.

396 But the presiding genius of the *Officium* was less accommodating than he had
397 anticipated. It might be that he was jealous of the soldiery, or of their particular
398 interference, or indignant at the butchery at the great gate, of which the news had just
399 come, or out of humour with the day's work, and especially with the Christians; at any
400 rate, Calphurnius found he had better have taken a bolder step, and have carried her as
401 a prisoner to the camp. However, nothing was now left for him but to depart; and
402 Callista fell again into the hands of the city, though of the superior functionaries, who
403 procured her a lodging for the night, and settled to bring her up for examination next
404 morning. {280}

405 The morning came, and she was had up. What passed did not transpire; but the issue
406 was that she was remanded for a further hearing, and was told she might send to her
407 brother, and acquaint him where she was. He was allowed one interview with her, and
408 he came away almost out of his senses, saying she was bewitched, and fancied herself
409 a Christian. What precisely she had said to him, which gave this impression, he could
410 hardly say; but it was plain there must be something wrong, or there would not be that
411 public process and formal examination which was fixed for the third day afterwards.