

## Chapter 6. Goths and Christians

1 {51} CORNELIUS was full of his subject, and did not attend to the Greek. "The wild-  
2 beasts hunts," he continued, "ah, those hunts during the games, Aristo! they were a  
3 spectacle for the gods. Twenty-two elephants, ten panthers, ten hyænas (by-the-bye, a  
4 new beast, not strange, however, to you here, I suppose), ten camelopards, a  
5 hippopotamus, a rhinoceros—I can't go through the list. Fancy the circus planted  
6 throughout for the occasion, and turned into a park, and then another set of wild  
7 animals, Getes and Sarmatians, Celts and Goths, sent in against them, to hunt down,  
8 capture and kill them, or to be killed themselves."

9 "Ah, the Goths!" answered Aristo; "those fellows give you trouble, though, now and  
10 then. Perhaps they will give you more. There is a report in the prætorium today that they  
11 have crossed the Danube."

12 "Yes, they *will* give us trouble," said Cornelius, drily; "they *have* given us trouble, and  
13 they will give us more. The Samnites gave us trouble, and {52} our friends, of Carthage  
14 here, and Jugurtha, and Mithridates; trouble, yes, that is the long and the short of it;  
15 they will give us trouble. Is trouble a new thing to Rome?" he asked, stretching out his  
16 arm, as if he were making a speech after dinner, and giving a toast.

17 "The Goths give trouble, and take a bribe," retorted Aristo; "this is what trouble means in  
18 their case: it's a troublesome fellow who hammers at our door till we pay his reckoning.  
19 It is troublesome to raise the means to buy them off. And the example of these  
20 troublesome savages is catching; it was lately rumoured that the Carpians had been  
21 asking the same terms for keeping quiet."

22 "It would ill become the majesty of Rome to soil her fingers with the blood of such  
23 vermin," said Cornelius; "she ignores them."

24 "And therefore she most majestically bleeds us instead," answered Aristo, "that she may  
25 have treasure to give them. We are not so troublesome as they; the more's the pity. No  
26 offence to you, however, or to the emperor, or to great Rome, Cornelius. We are over  
27 our cups; it's only a game of politics, you know, like chess or the *cottabus*. Maro bids  
28 you 'parcere subjectis, et debellare superbos;' but you have changed your manners.  
29 You coax the Goths and bully the poor African."

30 "Africa can show fight, too," interposed Jucundus, who had been calmly listening and  
31 enjoying his own wine; "witness Thysdrus. That was giving every {53} rapacious  
32 Quæstor a lesson that he may go too far, and find a dagger when he demands a purse."

33 He was alluding to the revolt of Africa, which led to the downfall of the tyrant Maximin  
34 and the exaltation of the Gordians, when the native landlords armed their peasantry,  
35 killed the imperial officer, and raised the standard of rebellion in the neighbouring town  
36 from impatience of exactions under which they suffered.

37 "No offence, I say, Cornelius, no offence to eternal Rome," said Aristo, "but you have  
38 explained to us why you weigh so heavy on us. I've always heard it was a fortune at  
39 Rome for a man to have found out a new tax. Vespasian did his best; but now you tax  
40 our smoke, and our very shadow; and Pescennius threatened to tax the air we breathe.  
41 We'll play at riddles, and you shall solve the following:—Say who is she that eats her  
42 own limbs, and grows eternal upon them? Ah, the Goths will take the measure of her  
43 eternity!"

44 "The Goths!" said Jucundus, who was warming into conversational life, "the Goths! no  
45 fear of the Goths; but," and he nodded significantly, "look at home; we have more to  
46 fear indoors than abroad."

47 "He means the prætorians," said Cornelius to Aristo, condescendingly; "I grant you that  
48 there have been several untoward affairs; we have had our problem, but it's a thing of  
49 the past, it never can come again. I venture to say that the power of the prætorians is at  
50 an end. That murder of the two emperors {54} the other day was the worst job they ever  
51 did; it has turned the public opinion of the whole world against them. I have no fear of  
52 the prætorians."

53 "I don't mean prætorians more than Goths," said Jucundus; "no, give me the old  
54 weapons, the old maxims of Rome, and I defy the scythe of Saturn. Do the soldiers  
55 march under the old ensign? do they swear by the old gods? do they interchange the  
56 good old signals and watchwords? do they worship the fortune of Rome; then I say we  
57 are safe. But do we take to new ways? do we trifle with religion? do we make light of  
58 Jupiter, Mars, Romulus, the augurs, and the ancilia? then I say, not all our shows and  
59 games, our elephants, hyænas, and hippopotamuses, will do us any good. It was not  
60 the best thing, no, not the best thing that the soldiers did, when they invested that Philip  
61 with the purple. But he is dead and gone." And he sat up and leant on his elbow.

62 "Ah! but it will be all set right now," said Cornelius, *you'll see.*"

63 "He'd be a reformer, that Philip," continued Jucundus, "and put down an enormity. Well,  
64 they call it an enormity; let it be an enormity. He'd put it down; but why? there's the  
65 point; why? It's no secret at all," and his voice grew angry, "that that hoary-headed  
66 Atheist Fabian was at the bottom of it; Fabian, the Christian. I hate reforms."

67 "Well, we had long wished to do it," answered Cornelius, "but could not manage it.  
68 Alexander {55} attempted it near twenty years ago. It's what philosophers have always  
69 aimed at."

70 "The gods consume philosophers and the Christians together!" said Jucundus devoutly.  
71 "There's little to choose between them, except that the Christians are the filthier animal  
72 of the two. But both are ruining the most glorious political structure that the world ever  
73 saw. I am not over-fond of Alexander either."

74 "Thank you in the name of philosophy," said the Greek.

75 "And thank you in the name of the Christians," chimed in Juba.

76 "That's good!" cried Jucundus; "the first word that hopeful youth has spoken since he  
77 came in, and he takes on him to call himself a Christian."

78 "I've a right to do so, if I choose," said Juba; "I've a right to be a Christian."

79 "Right! O yes, right! ha, ha!" answered Jucundus, "right! Jove help the lad! by all  
80 manner of means. Of course, you have a right to go *in malam rem* in whatever way you  
81 please."

82 "I am my own master," said Juba; "my father was a Christian. I suppose it depends on  
83 myself to follow him or not, according to my fancy, and as long as I think fit."

84 "Fancy! think fit!" answered Jucundus, "you pompous little mule! Yes, go and be a  
85 Christian, my dear child, as your doting father went. Go, like him, to the priest of their  
86 mysteries; be spit on, {56} stripped, dipped; feed on little boys' marrow and brains;  
87 worship the ass; and learn all the foul magic of the sect. And then be delated and taken  
88 up, and torn to shreds on the rack, or thrown to the lions and so go to Tartarus, if  
89 Tartarus there be, in the way you think fit. You'll harm none but yourself, my boy. I don't  
90 fear such as you, but the deeper heads."

91 Juba stood up with a look of offended dignity, and, as on former occasions, tossed the  
92 head which had been by implication disparaged. "I despise you," he said.

93 "Well, but you are hard on the Christians," said Aristo. "I have heard them maintain that  
94 their superstition, if adopted, would be the salvation of Rome. They maintain that the old  
95 religion is gone or going out; that something new is wanted to keep the empire together;  
96 and that their worship is just fitted to the times."

97 "All I say to the vipers," said Jucundus, "is, 'Let well alone. We did well enough without  
98 you; we did well enough till you sprang up.' A plague on their insolence; as if Jew or  
99 Egyptian could do aught for us when Numa and the Sibyl fail. That is what I say, Let  
100 Rome be true to herself and nothing can harm her; let her shift her foundation, and I  
101 would not buy her for this water-melon," he said, taking a suck at it. "Rome alone can  
102 harm Rome. Recollect old Horace, 'Suis et ipsa Roma viribus ruit.' He was a prophet. If  
103 she falls, it is by her own hand." {57}

104 "I agree," said Cornelius; "certainly, to set up any new worship is treason; not a doubt of  
105 it. The gods keep us from such ingratitude! We have grown great by means of them,  
106 and they are part and parcel of the law of Rome. But there is no great chance of our  
107 forgetting this; Decius won't; that's a fact. You will see. Time will show; perhaps  
108 tomorrow, perhaps next day," he added, mysteriously.

109 "Why in the world should you have this frantic dread of these poor scarecrows of  
110 Christians," said Aristo, "all because they hold an opinion? Why are you not afraid of the

111 bats and the moles? It's an opinion: there have been other opinions before them, and  
112 there will be other opinions after. Let them alone and they'll die away; make a hubbub  
113 about them and they'll spread."

114 "Spread?" cried Jucundus, who was under the twofold excitement of personal feeling  
115 and of wine, "spread, they'll spread? yes, they'll spread. Yes, grow, like scorpions,  
116 twenty at a birth. The country already swarms with them; they are as many as frogs or  
117 grasshoppers; they start up everywhere under one's nose, when one least expects  
118 them. The air breeds them like plague-flies; the wind drifts them like locusts. No one's  
119 safe; any one may be a Christian; it's an epidemic. Great Jove! I may be a Christian  
120 before I know where I am. Heaven and earth! is it not monstrous?" he continued, with  
121 increasing fierceness. "Yes, Jucundus, my poor man, you may wake and find yourself a  
122 Christian, without knowing it, {58} against your will. Ah! my friends, pity me! I may find  
123 myself a beast, and obliged to suck blood and live among the tombs as if I liked it,  
124 without power to tell you how I loathe it, all through their sorcery. By the genius of Rome  
125 something must be done. I say, no one is safe. You call on your friend; he is sitting in  
126 the dark, unwashed, uncombed, undressed. What is the matter? Ah! his son has turned  
127 Christian. Your wedding-day is fixed, you are expecting your bride; she does not come;  
128 why? she will not have you; she has become a Christian. Where's young Nomentanus?  
129 Who has seen Nomentanus? in the forum, or the campus, in the circus, in the bath?  
130 Has he caught the plague or got a sunstroke? Nothing of the kind; the Christians have  
131 caught hold of him. Young and old, rich and poor, my lady in her litter and her slave,  
132 modest maid and Lydia at the Thermæ, nothing comes amiss to them. All confidence is  
133 gone; there's no one we can reckon on. I go to my tailor's: 'Nergal,' I say to him, 'Nergal,  
134 I want a new tunic.' The wretched hypocrite bows, and runs to and fro, and unpacks his  
135 stuffs and cloths, like another man. A word in your ear. The man's a Christian, dressed  
136 up like a tailor. They have no dress of their own. If I were emperor, I'd make the  
137 sneaking curs wear a badge, I would; a dog's collar, a fox's tail, or a pair of ass's ears.  
138 Then we should know friends from foes when we meet them."

139 "We should think that dangerous," said Cornelius; "however, you are taking it too much  
140 to heart; you {59} are making too much of them, my good friend. They have not even  
141 got the present, and you are giving them the future, which is just what they want."

142 "If Jucundus will listen to me," said Aristo, "I could satisfy him that the Christians are  
143 actually falling off. They once were numerous in this very place; now there are hardly  
144 any. They have been declining for these fifty years; the danger from them is past. Do  
145 you want to know how to revive them? Put out an imperial edict, forbid them, denounce  
146 them. Do you want them to drop away like autumn leaves? Take no notice of them."

147 "I can't deny that in Italy they *have* grown," said Cornelius; "they *have* grown in numbers  
148 and in wealth, and they intermarry with us. Thus the upper class becomes to a certain  
149 extent infected. We may find it necessary to repress them; but, as you would repress  
150 vermin, without fearing them."

151 "The worshippers of the gods are the many, and the Christians are the few," persisted  
152 Aristo; "if the two parties intermarry, the weaker will get the worst of it. You will find the  
153 statues of the gods gradually creeping back into the Christian chapel; and a man must  
154 be an honest fellow who buys our images, eh, Jucundus?"

155 "Well, Aristo," said the paterfamilias, whose violence never lasted long, "if your sister's  
156 bright eyes win back my poor Agellius you will have something more to say for yourself  
157 than at present, I grant." {60}

158 "I see," said Cornelius, gravely, "I begin to understand it. I could not make out why our  
159 good host had such great fear for the stability of Rome. But it is one of those things  
160 which the experience of life has taught me. I have often seen it in the imperial city itself.  
161 Whenever you find a man show special earnestness against these fanatics, depend on  
162 it there is something that touches him personally in the matter. There was a very great  
163 man, the present Flamen Dialis, for whom I have unbounded respect; for a long time I  
164 was at a loss to conceive why a person of his weight, sound, sensible, well-judging,  
165 should have such a fear of the Christians. One day he made an oration against them in  
166 the senate-house; he wanted to send them to the rack. But the secret came out; the  
167 good man was on the rack himself about his daughter, who persisted in calling herself a  
168 Christian, and refused to paint her face or go to the amphitheatre. To be sure, a most  
169 trying affair this for the old gentleman. The venerable Pater Patratus, too, what suppers  
170 he gave! a fine specimen of the Lucullus type; yet he was always advocating the lictor  
171 and the *commentariensis* in the instance of the Christian. No wonder; his wife and son  
172 were disgracing him in the eyes of the whole world by frequenting the meetings of these  
173 Christians. However, I agree with Decius, they must be put down. They are not  
174 formidable, but they are an eyesore."

175 Here the rushing of the water-clock which measured time in the neighbouring square,  
176 ceased, signifying {61} thereby that the night was getting on. Juba had already crept  
177 into the dark closet which served him for a sleeping-place; had taken off his sandals,  
178 and loosened his belt; had wrapt the serpent he had about him round his neck, and was  
179 breathing heavily. Jucundus made the parting libation, and Cornelius took his leave.  
180 Aristo rose too; and Jucundus, accompanying them to the entrance, paid the not  
181 uncommon penalty of his potations, for the wine mounted to his head, and he returned  
182 into the room, and sat him down again with an impression that Aristo was still at table.

183 "My dear boy," he said, "Agellius is but a wet Christian; that's all, not obstinate, like his  
184 brother there. 'Twas his father; the less we say about him the better; he's gone. The  
185 Furies make his bed for him! an odious set! Their priests, little ugly men. I saw one  
186 when I was a boy at Carthage. So unlike your noble Roman Saliar, or your fine portly  
187 priest of Isis, clad in white, breathing odours like spring flowers; men who enjoyed this  
188 life, not like that sour hypocrite. He was as black as an Ethiopian, and as withered as a  
189 Saracen, and he never looked you in the face. And, after all, the fellow must die for his  
190 religion, rather than put a few grains of golden incense on the altar of great Jove. Jove's  
191 the god for me; a glorious, handsome, curly god—but they are all good, all the gods are  
192 good. There's Bacchus, he's a good, comfortable god, though a sly, treacherous

193 fellow—a treacherous fellow. There's Ceres, too; Pomona; the {62} Muses; Astarte, too,  
194 as they call her here; all good;—and Apollo, though he's somewhat too hot in this  
195 season, and too free with his bow. He gave me a bad fever once. Ah! life's precious,  
196 most precious; so I felt it then, when I was all but gone to Pluto. Life never returns, it's  
197 like water spilt; you can't gather it up. It is dispersed into the elements, to the four winds.  
198 Ah! there's something more there than I can tell; more than all your philosophers can  
199 determine."

200 He seemed to think awhile, and began again: "Enjoyment's the great rule; ask yourself,  
201 'Have I made the most of things?' that's what I say to the rising generation. Many and  
202 many's the time when I have not turned them to the best account. Oh, if I had now to  
203 begin life again, how many things should I correct! I might have done better this  
204 evening. Those abominable pears! I might have known they would not be worth the  
205 eating. Mutton, that was all well; doves, good again; crane, kid; well, I don't see that I  
206 could have done much better."

207 After a few minutes he got up half asleep, and put out all the lights but one small lamp,  
208 with which he made his way into his own bed-closet. "All is vanity," he continued, with a  
209 slow, grave utterance, "all is vanity but eating and drinking. It does not pay to serve the  
210 gods except for this. What's fame? what's glory? what's power? smoke. I've often  
211 thought the hog is the only really wise animal. We should be happier if we were all hogs.  
212 Hogs keep the end {63} of life steadily in view; that's why those toads of Christians will  
213 not eat them, lest they should get like them. Quiet, respectable, sensible enjoyment; not  
214 riot, or revel, or excess, or quarrelling. Life is short." And with this undeniable sentiment  
215 he fell asleep.

## Chapter 7. Persecution in the Offing

216 {64} NEXT morning, as Jucundus was dusting and polishing his statues and other  
217 articles of taste and devotion, supplying the gaps in their ranks, and grouping a number  
218 of new ones which had come in from his workmen, Juba strutted into the shop, and  
219 indulged himself from time to time in an inward laugh or snigger at the various  
220 specimens of idolatry which grinned or frowned or frisked or languished on all sides of  
221 him.

222 "Don't sneer at that Anubis," said his uncle; "it is the work of the divine Callista."

223 "That, I suppose, is why she brings into existence so many demons," answered Juba;  
224 "nothing more can be done in the divine line; like the queen who fell in love with a  
225 baboon."

226 "Now I come to think," retorted Jucundus, "that god of hers is something like *you*. She  
227 must be in love with you, Juba."

228 The youth, as was usual with him, tossed his head with an air of lofty displeasure; at  
229 length he said, "And why should she not fall in love with me, pray?" {65}

230 "Why, because you are too good or too bad to need her plastic hand. She could not  
231 make anything out of you. 'Non ex quovis ligno.' But she'd be doing a good work if she  
232 wiled back your brother."

233 "*He* does not want wiling any more than I," said Juba, "*I* dare say! he's no Christian."

234 "What's that?" said his uncle, looking round at him in surprise; "Agellius no Christian?"

235 "Not a bit of it," answered Juba; "rest assured. I taxed him with it only last night; let him  
236 alone, *he'll* come round. He's too proud to change, that's all. Preach to him, entreat him,  
237 worry him, try to turn him, work at the bit, whip him, and he will turn restive, start aside,  
238 or run away; but let him have his head, pretend not to look, seem indifferent to the  
239 whole matter, and he will quietly sit down in the midst of your images there. Callista has  
240 an easy task; she'll bribe him to do what he would else do for nothing."

241 "The very best news I have heard since your silly old father died," cried Jucundus; "the  
242 very best—if true. Juba, I'll give you an handsome present the first sow your brother  
243 sacrifices to Ceres. Ha, ha, what fine fun to see the young farmer over his cups at the  
244 Nundinæ! Ha, ha, no Christian! bravo, Juba! ha, ha, I'll make you a present, I say, an  
245 Apollo to teach you manners, or a Mercury to give you wit."

246 "It's quite true," said Juba; "he would not be thinking of Callista, if he were thinking of his  
247 saints and angels."

248 "Ha, ha! to be sure!" returned Jucundus; "to be {66} sure! yet why shouldn't he worship  
249 a handsome Greek girl as well as any of those mummies and death's heads and bogies  
250 of his, which I should blush to put up here alongside even of Anubis, or a scarabæus?"

251 "Mother thinks she is not altogether the girl you take her for," said his nephew.

252 "No matter, no matter," answered Jucundus, "no matter at all; she may be a Lais or  
253 Phryne for me; the surer to make a man of him."

254 "Why," said Juba, "mother thinks her head is turning in the opposite way. D'you see?  
255 Strange, isn't it?" he added, annoyed himself yet not unwilling to annoy his uncle.

256 "Hm!" exclaimed Jucundus, making a wry face and looking round at him, as if to say,  
257 "What on earth is going to turn up now?"

258 "To tell the truth," said Juba, gloomily, "I did once think of her myself. I don't see why I  
259 have not as much right to do so as Agellius, if I please. So I thought old mother might do  
260 something for me; and I asked her for a charm or love potion, which would bring her  
261 from her brother down to the forest yonder. Gurta took to it kindly, for she has a mortal  
262 hatred of Callista, because of her good looks, though she won't say so, and because  
263 she's a Greek! and she liked the notion of humbling the haughty minx. So she began  
264 one of the most tremendous spells," he shrieked out with a laugh, "one of the most

265 tremendous spells in her whole budget. All and everything in the most exact religious  
266 way: wine, milk, blood, meal, wax, old {67} rags, gods, Numidian as well as Punic; such  
267 names; one must be barbarian to boot, as well as witch, to pronounce them: a score of  
268 things there were besides. And then to see the old woman, with her streaming grey hair,  
269 twinkling eyes, and grim look, twirl about as some flute girl at a banquet; it was enough  
270 to dance down, not only the moon, but the whole milky way. But it did not dance down  
271 Callista; at which mother got savage, and protested that Callista was a Christian."

272 Jucundus looked much perplexed. "Medius fidius!" he said, "why, unless we look sharp,  
273 she will be converting him the wrong way;" and he began pacing up and down the small  
274 room.

275 Juba on his part began singing—

276 "Gurta the witch would have part in the jest;  
277 Though lame as a gull, by his highness possessed,  
278 She shouldered her crutch, and danced with the rest.

279 "Sporting and snorting, deep in the night,  
280 Their beards flashing fire, and their hoofs striking light,  
281 And their tails whisking round in the heat of their flight."

282 By this time Jucundus had recovered from the qualm which Juba's intelligence had  
283 caused him, and he cried out, "Cease your rubbish; old Gurta's jealous; I know her  
284 spite; Christian is the most blackguard word in her vocabulary, its Barbar for toad or  
285 adder. I see it all; no, Callista, the divine Callista, must take in hand this piece of wax,  
286 sing a charm, and mould him into a Vertumnus. She'll {68} show herself the more potent  
287 witch of the two. The new emperor too will help the incantation."

288 "What! something is coming?" asked Juba, with a grin.

289 "Coming, boy? yes, I warrant you," answered his uncle. "We'll make them squeak. If  
290 gentle means don't do, then we'll just throw in another ingredient or two: an axe, or a  
291 wild cat, or a firebrand."

292 "Take care what you are about, if you deal with Agellius," said Juba. "He's a sawney,  
293 but you must not drive him to bay. Don't threaten; keep to the other line; he's weak-  
294 hearted."

295 "Only as a background to bring out the painting; the Muse singing, all in light, relieved  
296 by sardix or sepia. It *must* come; but perhaps Agellius will come first."

297 It was indeed as Jucundus had hinted; a new policy, a new era was coming upon  
298 Christianity, together with the new emperor. Christians had hitherto been for the most  
299 part the objects of popular fury rather than of imperial jealousy. Nero, indeed, from his  
300 very love of cruelty, had taken pleasure in torturing them: but statesmen and

301 philosophers, though at times perplexed and inconsistent, yet on the whole had  
302 despised them; and the superstition of priests and people, with their "Christianos ad  
303 leones," had been the most formidable enemy of the faith. Accordingly, atrocious as the  
304 persecution had been at times, it had been conducted on no plan, and had been local  
305 and {69} fitful. But even this trial had been suspended, with but few interruptions, during  
306 the last thirty, nay, fifty years. So favourable a state of things had been more or less  
307 brought about by a succession of emperors, who had shown an actual leaning to  
308 Christianity. While the vigorous rule of the five good emperors, as they are called, had  
309 had many passages in its history of an adverse character, those who followed after,  
310 being untaught in the traditions, and strangers to the spirit, of old Rome, foreigners, or  
311 adventurers, or sensualists, were protectors of the new religion. The favourite mistress  
312 of Commodus is even said to have been a Christian; so is the nurse of Caracalla. The  
313 wretched Heliogabalus, by his taste for Oriental superstitions, both weakened the  
314 influence of the established hierarchy, and encouraged the toleration of a faith which  
315 came from Palestine. The virtuous Alexander, who followed him, was a philosopher  
316 more than a statesman; and, in pursuance of the syncretism which he had adopted,  
317 placed the images of Abraham and our Lord among the objects of devotion which his  
318 private chapel contained. What is told us of the Emperor Philip is still more to the point:  
319 the gravest authorities report that he was actually a Christian; and, since it cannot be  
320 doubted that Christians were persuaded of the fact, the leaning of his government must  
321 have been emphatically in their favour to account for such a belief. In consequence,  
322 Christians showed themselves without fear; they emerged from the catacombs, and  
323 built churches in public view; and, {70} though in certain localities, as in the instance of  
324 Africa, they had suffered from the contact of the world, they spread far and wide, and  
325 faith became the instrument at least of political power, even where it was wanting in  
326 charity, or momentarily disowned by cowardice. In a word, though Celsus a hundred  
327 years before had pronounced "a man weak who should hope to unite the three portions  
328 of the earth in a common religion," that common Catholic faith had been found, and a  
329 principle of empire was created which had never before existed. The phenomenon  
330 could not be mistaken; and the Roman statesman saw he had to deal with a rival. Nor  
331 must we suppose, because on the surface of the history we read so much of the  
332 vicissitudes of imperial power, and of the profligacy of its possessors, that the fabric of  
333 government was not sustained by traditions of the strongest temper, and by officials of  
334 the highest sagacity. It was the age of lawyers and politicians; and they saw more and  
335 more clearly that if Christianity was not to revolutionize the empire, they must follow out  
336 the line of action which Trajan and Antoninus had pointed out.

337 Decius then had scarcely assumed the purple, when he commenced that new policy  
338 against the Church which was reserved to Diocletian, fifty years later, to carry out to its  
339 own final refutation. He entered on his power at the end of the year 249; and on the  
340 January 20th following, the day on which the Church still celebrates the event, St.  
341 Fabian, Bishop of Rome, {71} obtained the crown of martyrdom. He had been pope for  
342 the unusually long space of fourteen years, having been elected in consequence of one  
343 of those remarkable interpositions of Divine Providence of which we now and then read  
344 in the first centuries of the Church. He had come up to Rome from the country, in order  
345 to be present at the election of a successor to Pope Anteros. A dove was seen to settle

346 on his head, and the assembly rose up and forced him, to his surprise, upon the  
347 episcopal throne. After bringing back the relics of St. Pontian, his martyred predecessor,  
348 from Sardinia, and having become the apostle of great part of Gaul, he seemed  
349 destined to end his history in the same happy quiet and obscurity in which he had lived;  
350 but it did not become a pope of that primitive time to die upon his bed, and he was  
351 reserved at length to inaugurate in his own person, as chief pastor of the Church, a  
352 fresh company of martyrs.

353 Suddenly an edict appeared for the extermination of the name and religion of Christ. It  
354 was addressed to the proconsuls and other governors of provinces; and alleged or  
355 implied that the emperors, Decius and his son, being determined to give peace to their  
356 subjects, found the Christians alone an impediment to the fulfilment of their purpose;  
357 and that, by reason of the enmity which those sectaries entertained towards the gods of  
358 Rome,—an enmity which was bringing down upon the world multiplied misfortunes.  
359 Desirous, then, above all things, of appeasing the divine anger, they made an  
360 irrevocable ordinance that every Christian, {72} without exception of rank, sex, or age,  
361 should be obliged to sacrifice. Those who refused were to be thrown into prison, and in  
362 the first instance submitted to moderate punishments. If they conformed to the  
363 established religion, they were to be rewarded; if not, they were to be drowned, burned  
364 alive, exposed to the beasts, hung upon the trees, or otherwise put to death. This edict  
365 was read in the camp of the prætorians, posted up in the Capitol, and sent over the  
366 empire by government couriers. The authorities in each province were themselves  
367 threatened with heavy penalties, if they did not succeed in frightening or tormenting the  
368 Christians into the profession of paganism.

369 St. Fabian, as we have said, was the first-fruits of the persecution, and eighteen months  
370 passed before his successor could be appointed. In the course of the next two months  
371 St. Pionius was burned alive at Smyrna, and St. Nestor crucified in Pamphylia. At  
372 Carthage some perplexity and delay were occasioned by the absence of the proconsul.  
373 St. Cyprian, its bishop, took advantage of the delay, and retired into a place of  
374 concealment. The populace had joined with the imperial government in seeking his life,  
375 and had cried out furiously in the circus, demanding him "ad leonem," for the lion. A  
376 panic seized the Christian body, and for a while there were far more persons found to  
377 compromise their faith than to confess it. It seemed as if Aristo's anticipation was  
378 justified, that Christianity was losing its hold upon the mind of its subjects, and that  
379 nothing more was {73} needed for those who had feared it, than to let it die a natural  
380 death. And at Sicca the Roman officials, as far as ever they dared, seemed to act on  
381 this view. Here Christians did no harm, they made no show, and there was little or  
382 nothing in the place to provoke the anger of the mob or to necessitate the interference  
383 of the magistrate. The proconsul's absence from Carthage was both an encouragement  
384 and an excuse for delay; and hence it was that, though we are towards the middle of the  
385 year 250, and the edict was published at Rome at its commencement, the good people  
386 of Sicca had, as we have said, little knowledge of what was taking place in the political  
387 world, and whispered about vague presages of an intended measure, which had been  
388 in some places in operation for many months. Communication with the seat of  
389 government was not so very frequent or rapid in those days, and public curiosity had not

390 been stimulated by the facilities of gratifying it. And thus we must account for a  
391 phenomenon, which we uphold to be a fact in the instance of Sicca, in the early summer  
392 of A.D. 250, even though it prove unaccountable, and history has nothing to say about  
393 it, and in spite of the *Acta Diurna*.

394 The case, indeed, is different now. In these times, newspapers, railroads, and magnetic  
395 telegraphs make us independent of government messengers. The proceedings at Rome  
396 would have been generally and accurately known in a few seconds; and then, by way of  
397 urging forward the magistracy, a question of course {74} would have been asked in the  
398 parliament of Carthage by the member for Sicca, or Laribus, or Thugga, or by some one  
399 of the pagani, or country party, whether the popular report was true, that an edict had  
400 been promulgated at Rome against the Christians, and what steps had been taken by  
401 the local authorities throughout the proconsulate to carry out its provisions. And then the  
402 "Colonia Siccensis" would have presented some good or bad reason for the delay: that  
403 it arose from the absence of the proconsul from the seat of government, or from the  
404 unaccountable loss of the despatch on its way from the coast; or, perhaps, on the other  
405 hand, the under-secretary would have maintained, amid the cheers of his supporters,  
406 that the edict had been promulgated and carried out at Sicca to the full, that crowds of  
407 Christians had at once sacrificed, and that, in short, there was no one to punish;  
408 assertions which at that moment were too likely to be verified by the event.

409 In truth, there were many reasons to make the magistrates, both Roman and native,  
410 unwilling to proceed in the matter, till they were obliged. No doubt they one and all  
411 detested Christianity, and would have put it down, if they could; but the question was,  
412 when they came to the point, *what* they should put down. If, indeed, they could have got  
413 hold of the ringleaders, the bishops of the Church, they would have tortured, and  
414 smashed them *con amore*, as you would kill a wasp; and with the greater warmth and  
415 satisfaction, just because it was so difficult {75} to get at them. Those bishops were a  
416 set of fellows as mischievous as they were cowardly; they would not come out and be  
417 killed, but they skulked in the desert, and hid in masquerade. But why should gentlemen  
418 in office, opulent and happy, set about worrying a handful of idiots, old, or poor, or boys,  
419 or women, or obscure, or amiable and well-meaning men, who were but a remnant of a  
420 former generation, and as little connected with the fanatics of Carthage, Alexandria, or  
421 Rome, as the English freemasons may seem to be with their namesakes on the  
422 continent? True, Christianity was a secret society, and an illegal religion; but would it  
423 cease to be so when those harmless or respectable inhabitants of the place had been  
424 mounted on the rack or the gibbet?

425 And then, too, it was a most dangerous thing to open the door to popular excitement;—  
426 who would be able to shut it? Once rouse the populace, and it was all over with the  
427 place. It could not be denied that the bigoted and ignorant majority, not only of the  
428 common people, but of the better classes, was steeped in a bitter prejudice, and an  
429 intense, though latent, hatred of Christianity. Besides the antipathy which arose from the  
430 extremely different views of life and duty taken by pagans and Christians, which would  
431 give a natural impulse to persecution in the hearts of the former, there were the many  
432 persons who wished to curry favour at Rome with the government, and had an eye to

433 preferment or reward. There was the pagan interest, extended and powerful, of that {76}  
434 numerous class which was attached to the established religions by habit, position,  
435 interest, or the prospect of advantage. There were all the great institutions or  
436 establishments of the place; the law courts, the schools of grammar and rhetoric, the  
437 philosophic *exedræ* and lecture-rooms, the theatre, the amphitheatre, the market—all  
438 were, for one reason or another, opposed to Christianity; and who could tell where they  
439 would stop in their onward course, if they were set in motion? "Quieta non movenda"  
440 was the motto of the local government, native and imperial, and that the more, because  
441 it was an age of revolutions, and they might be most unpleasantly compromised or  
442 embarrassed by the direction which the movement took. Besides, Decius was not  
443 immortal; in the last twelve years eight emperors had been cut off, six of them in a few  
444 months; and who could tell but the successor of the present might revert to the policy of  
445 Philip, and feel no thanks to those who had suddenly left it for a policy of blood.

446 In this cautious course they would be powerfully supported by the influence of personal  
447 considerations. The Roman *officia*, the city magistrates, the heads of the established  
448 religions, the lawyers, and the philosophers, all would have punished the Christians, if  
449 they could; but they could not agree whom to punish. They would have agreed with  
450 great satisfaction, as we have said, to inflict condign and capital punishment upon the  
451 heads of the sect; and they would have had no objection, if driven to do something, to  
452 get hold of {77} some strangers or slaves, who might be a sort of scapegoats for the  
453 rest; but it was impossible, when they once began to persecute, to make distinctions,  
454 and not a few of them had relations who were Christians, or at least were on that  
455 border-land which the mob might mistake for the domain of Christianity—Marcionites,  
456 Tertullianists, Montanists, or Gnostics. When once the cry of "the gods of Rome" was  
457 fairly up, it would apply to tolerated religions as well as to illicit, and an unhappy votary  
458 of Isis or Mithras might suffer, merely because there were few Christians forthcoming. A  
459 duumvir of the place had a daughter whom he had turned out of his house for receiving  
460 baptism, and who had taken refuge at Vacca. Several of the decurions, the *tabularius* of  
461 the district, the *scriba*, one of the exactors, who lived in Sicca, various of the retired  
462 gentry, whom we spoke of in a former chapter, and various *attachés* of the prætorium,  
463 were in not dissimilar circumstances. Nay, the priest of Esculapius had a wife, whom he  
464 was very fond of, who, though she promised to keep quiet, if things continued as they  
465 were, nevertheless had the madness to vow that, if there were any severe proceedings  
466 instituted against her people, she would at once come forward, confess herself a  
467 Christian, and throw water, instead of incense, upon the sacrificial flame. Not to speak  
468 of the venerable man's tenderness for her, such an exposure would seriously  
469 compromise his respectability, and, as he was infirm and apoplectic, it was a question  
470 whether Esculapius himself could save {78} him from the shock which would be the  
471 consequence.

472 The same sort of feeling operated with our good friend Jucundus. He was attached to  
473 his nephew; but, be it said without disrespect to him, he was more attached to his own  
474 reputation; and, while he would have been seriously annoyed at seeing Agellius  
475 exposed to one of the panthers of the neighbouring forest, or hung up by the feet, with  
476 the blood streaming from his nose and mouth, as one of the dogs or kids of the market,

477 he would have disliked the *éclat* of the thing still more. He felt both anger and alarm at  
478 the prospect; he was conscious he did not understand his nephew, or (to use a common  
479 phrase) know where to find him; he was aware that a great deal of tact was necessary  
480 to manage him; and he had an instinctive feeling that Juba was right in saying that it  
481 would not do to threaten him with the utmost severity of the law. He considered  
482 Callista's hold on him was the most promising quarter of the horizon; so he came to a  
483 resolution to do as little as he could personally, but to hold Agellius's head, as far as he  
484 could, steadily in the direction of that lady, and to see what came of it. As to Juba's  
485 assurance that Agellius was not a Christian at heart, it was too good news to be true;  
486 but still it might be only an anticipation of what would be, when the sun of Greece shone  
487 out upon him, and dispersed the remaining mists of Oriental superstition.

488 In this state of mind the old gentleman determined {79} one afternoon to leave his shop  
489 to the care of a slave, and to walk down to his nephew, to judge for himself of his state  
490 of mind; to bait his hook with Callista, and to see if Agellius bit. There was no time to be  
491 lost, for the publication of the edict might be made any day; and then disasters might  
492 ensue which no skill could remedy.