

shine and His rain equally upon His enemies as upon His friends, shall weak man frame another rule of justice?"

At these words Fabiola wondered; they were so like those of her mysterious parchment, identical with the moral theories of her slave.

"You have been in the East, I believe, Sebastian," she asked him, rather abruptly; "was it there that you learnt these principles? For I have one near me who is yet, by her own choice, a servant, a woman of rare moral perceptions, who has propounded to me the same ideas, and she is an Asiatic."

"It is not in any distant country that I learnt them, for here I sucked them in with my mother's milk; though originally they doubtless came from the East."

"They are certainly beautiful in the abstract," remarked Fabiola; "but death would overtake us before we could half carry them out, were we to make them our principles of conduct."

"And how better could death find us, though not surprise us, than in thus doing our duty, even if not to its completion?"

"For my part," resumed the lady, "I am of the old Epicurean poet's mind. This world is a banquet, from which I shall be ready to depart when I have had my fill—*ut conviva satur*—and not till then. I wish to read life's book through, and close it calmly, only when I have finished its last page."

Sebastian shook his head, smiling, and said, "The last page of this world's book comes but in the middle of the volume, wherever 'death' may happen to be written. But on the next page begins the illuminated book of a new life—without a last page."

"I understand you," replied Fabiola good-humoredly; "you are a brave soldier, and you speak as such. You must be always prepared for death from a thousand casualties: we seldom see it approach suddenly; it comes more mercifully and stealthily upon the weak. You no doubt are musing on a more glorious fate, on receiving in front full sheaves of arrows from the enemy, and falling covered with honor. You look to the soldier's funeral pile, with trophies erected over it. To you, after death, opens its bright page the book of glory."

"No, no, gentle lady," exclaimed Sebastian emphatically; "I mean not so. I care not for glory, which can only be enjoyed by an anticipating fancy. I speak of vulgar death, as it may come to me in common with the poorest slave; consuming me by slow burning fever, wasting me by long lingering consumption, racking me by slowly eating ulcers; nay, if you please, by the still crueler inflictions of men's wrath. In any form let it come; it comes from a hand that I love."

"And do you really mean that death so contemplated would be welcomed by you?"

"As joyful as is the epicure, when the doors of the banqueting hall are thrown wide open, and he sees beyond them the brilliant lamps, the glittering table, and its delicious viands, with its attendant ministers well girt, and crowned with roses; as blithe as is the bride when the bridegroom is announced, coming with rich gifts, to conduct her to her new home, will my exulting heart be, when death, under whatever form, throws back the gates, iron on this side, but golden on the other, which lead to a new and perennial life. And I care not how grim the messenger may be that proclaims the approach of Him who is celestially beautiful."

"And who is He?" asked Fabiola eagerly. "Can He not be seen save through the fleshless ribs of death?"

"No," replied Sebastian; "for it is He who must reward us, not only for our lives, but for our deaths also. Happy they whose inmost hearts, which He has ever read, have been kept pure and innocent, as well as their deeds have been virtuous! For them is this bright vision of Him, whose true rewards only then begin."

How very like Syra's doctrines! she thought. But before she could speak again, to ask whence they came,

a slave entered, stood on the threshold, and respectfully said, "A courier, madam, is just arrived from Baïæ."

"Pardon me, Sebastian!" she exclaimed. "Let him enter immediately."

The messenger came in, covered with dust and jaded, having left his tired horse at the gate, and offered her a sealed packet.

Her hand trembled as she took it; and while she was unloosening its bands, she hesitatingly asked, "From my father?"

"About him at least," was the ominous reply.

She opened the sheet, glanced over it, shrieked, and fell. Sebastian caught her before she reached the ground, laid her on a couch, and delicately left her in the hands of her handmaids, who had rushed in at the cry.

One glance had told her all. Her father was dead.

CHAPTER VIII. DARKER STILL.

When Sebastian came into the court, he found a little crowd of domestics gathered round the courier, listening to the details of their master's death.

The letter of which Torquatus was the bearer to him had produced its desired effect. He called at his villa, and spent a few days with his daughter, on his way to Asia. He was more than usually affectionate; and when they parted, both father and daughter seemed to have a melancholy foreboding that they would meet no more. He soon, however, recovered his spirits at Baïæ, where a party of good livers anxiously awaited him; and where he considered himself obliged to stay, while his galley was being fitted up, and stored with the best wines and provisions which Campania afforded, for his voyage. He indulged, however, his luxurious tastes to excess; and on coming out of a bath, after a hearty supper, he was seized with a chill, and in four-and-twenty hours was a corpse. He had left his undivided wealth to his only child. In fine, the body was being embalmed when the courier started, and was to be brought by his galley to Ostia.

On hearing this sad tale, Sebastian was almost sorry that he had spoken as he had done of death; and left the house with mournful thoughts.

Fabiola's first plunge into the dark abyss of grief was deep and dismal, down into unconsciousness. Then the buoyancy of youth and mind bore her up again to the surface; and her view of life, to the horizon, was as of a boundless ocean of black seething waves, on which floated no living thing save herself. Her woe seemed utter and unmeasured; and she closed her eyes with a shudder, and suffered herself to sink again into oblivion, till once more roused to wakefulness of mind. Again and again she was thus tossed up and down, between transient death and life, while her attendants applied remedies to what they deemed a succession of alarming fits and convulsions. At length she sat up, pale, staring, and fearless, gently pushing aside the hand that tried to administer restoratives to her. In this state she remained long; a stupor, fixed and deadly, seemed to have entranced her; the pupils were almost insensible to the light and fears were whispered of her brain becoming oppressed. The physician, who had been called, uttered distinctly and forcibly into her ears the question, "Fabiola, do you know that your father is dead?" She started, fell back, and a bursting flood of tears relieved her heart and head. She spoke of her father, and called for him amidst her sobs, and said wild and incoherent, but affectionate things about, and to, him. Sometimes she seemed to think him still alive, then she remembered he was dead; and so she wept and moaned, till sleep took the turn of tears, in nursing her shattered mind and frame.

Euphrosyne and Syra alone watched by her. The former had, from time to time, put in the commonplace of heathen consolation, had reminded her, too, how kind a master, how honest a man, how loving a father he had been. But the Christian sat in silence, except to speak gentle and soothing words to her mistress, and served her with an active delicacy, which even then was not unnoticed. What could she do more,

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