

Miriam, who was now raised to a reclining position, took Fabiola's hand between both hers; and turning round towards her, in a soft and mild but most earnest tone thus addressed her—

"Good and gentle lady, for one moment listen to me. Not to depreciate what you are good enough to value, since it pains you to hear it, but to teach you how far we still are from what might have been done, let me trace for you a parallel scene, but where all shall be reversed. Let it be a slave—pardon me, dear Fabiola, for another pang—I see it in your face, but it shall be the last—yes, a slave, brutish, ungrateful, rebellious to the most benign and generous of masters. And let the stroke, not of an assassin, but of the minister of justice, impend over his head. What would you call the act, how would you characterise the virtue, of that master, if out of pure love, and that he might reclaim that wretched man, he should rush beneath the axe's blow, ay, and its preceding ignominious stripes, and leave written in his will that he made that slave heir to his titles and his wealth and desired him to be considered as his brother?"

"O Miriam, Miriam, you have drawn a picture too sublime to be believed of man. You have not eclipsed your own deed, for I spoke of *human* virtue. To act as you have now described would require, if possible, that of a God!"

Miriam pressed the folded hand to her bosom, fixed on Fabiola's wondering eyes a look of heavenly inspiration as she sweetly and solemnly replied: "AND JESUS CHRIST, WHO DID ALL THIS FOR MAN, WAS TRULY GOD."

Fabiola covered her face with both her hands, and for a long time was silent. Miriam prayed earnestly in her own tranquil heart.

"Miriam, I thank you from my soul," at length Fabiola said: "you have fulfilled your promise of guiding me. For some time I have only been fearing that you might not be a Christian; but it could not be."

"Now tell me, are those awful, but sweet words which you just now uttered, which have sunk into my heart as deeply, as silently, and as irrevocably as a piece of gold dropt upon the surface of the still ocean goes down into its depths—are those words a mere part of the Christian system, or are they its essential principle?"

"From a simple allegory, dear lady, your powerful mind has in one bound reached and grasped the master-key of our whole teaching: the alembic of your refined understanding has extracted and condensed into one thought the most vital and prominent doctrines of Christianity. You have distilled them into their very essence."

"That man, God's creature and bondsman, rebelled against his Lord: that justice irresistible had doomed and pursued him; that this very Lord 'took the form of a servant, and in habit was found like a man': that in this form He suffered stripes, buffets, mockery, and shameful death, became the 'Crucified One,' as men here call Him, and thereby rescued man from his fate, and gave him part in His own riches and kingdom: all this is comprised in the words that I have spoken."

"And you had reached the right conclusion. Only God could have performed so godlike an action, or have offered so sublime an expiation."

Fabiola was again wrapped up in silent thought, till she timidly asked—

"And was it to this that you referred in Campania, when you spoke of God alone being a victim worthy of God?"

"Yes; but I further alluded to the continuation of that sacrifice, even in our own days, by a marvellous dispensation of an all-powerful love. However, on this I must not yet speak."

Fabiola resumed: "I every moment see how all that you have ever spoken to me coheres and fits together like the parts of one plant; all springing one from another. I thought it bore only the lovely flowers of an elegant theory; you have shown me in your conduct how these can ripen into sweet and solid fruit. In the doctrine which you have just explained I seem

to myself to find the noble stem from which all the others branch forth—even to that very fruit. For who would refuse to do for another what is much less than God has done for him? But, Miriam, there is a deep and unseen root whence springs all this, possibly dark beyond contemplation, deep beyond reach, complex beyond man's power to unravel; yet perhaps simple to a confiding mind. If in my present ignorance I can venture to speak it should be vast enough to occupy all nature, rich enough to fill creation with all that is good and perfect in it, strong enough to bear the growth of your noble tree, till its summit reach above the stars, and its branches to the ends of earth."

"I mean your idea of that God whom you made me fear, when you spoke to me as a philosopher of Him, and taught me to know as the ever-present Watchman and Judge; but whom I am sure you will make me love when, as a Christian, you exhibit Him to me as the root and origin of such boundless tenderness and mercy."

"Without some deep mystery in His nature, as yet unknown to me, I cannot fully apprehend that wonderful doctrine of man's purchase."

"Fabiola," responded Miriam, "more learned teachers than I should undertake the instruction of one so gifted and so acute. But will you believe me if I attempt to give you some explanation?"

"Miriam," replied Fabiola, with strong emphasis, "ONE WHO IS READY TO DIE FOR ANOTHER WILL CERTAINLY NOT DECEIVE HIM."

"And now," rejoined the patient, smiling, "you have again seized a great principle—that of FAITH. I will, therefore, be only the simple narrator of what Jesus Christ, who truly died for us, has taught us. You will believe my word only as that of a faithful witness; you will accept His as that of an unerring God."

Fabiola bowed her head and listened with reverential mind to her, in whom she had long honored a teacher of marvellous wisdom, which she drew from some unknown school; but whom now she almost worshipped as an angel, who could open to her the flood-gates of the eternal ocean whose waters are the unfathomable Wisdom, overflowing on earth.

Miriam expounded, in the simple terms of Catholic teaching, the sublime doctrine of the Trinity; then after relating the fall of man, unfolded the mystery of the Incarnation, giving, in the very words of St. John, the history of the Eternal Word, till He was made flesh, and dwelt among men. Often was she interrupted by the expressions of admiration or assent which her pupil uttered; never by cavil or doubt. Philosophy had given place to religion, captiousness to docility, incredulity to faith.

But now a sadness seemed to have come over Fabiola's heart; Miriam read it in her looks, and asked her its cause.

"I hardly dare tell you," she replied. "But all that you have related to me is so beautiful, so divine, that it seems to me necessarily to end here."

"The Word (what a noble name!), that is, the expression of God's love, the extention of His wisdom, the evidence of His power, the very breath of His life-giving life, which is Himself, becometh flesh. Who shall furnish it to Him? Shall He take up the cast-off slough of a tainted humanity, or shall a new manhood be created expressly for Him? Shall He take His place in a double genealogy, receiving thus into Himself a twofold tide of corruption; and shall there be any one on earth daring and high enough to call himself His father?"

"No," softly whispered Miriam; "but there shall be one holy enough, and humble enough, to be worthy to call herself His mother!"

"Almost 800 years before the Son of God came into the world a prophet spoke and recorded his words, and deposited the record of them in the hands of the Jews, Christ's inveterate enemies; and his words were these: 'Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and His name shall be called Emanuel,' which in the Hebrew language signifies 'God with us,' that is, with men."