

## THE CAVE OF PAN.

A TALE OF THE THIRD CENTURY.

## CHAPTER V.—(Continued.)

Astyrius only quitted his sick friend for food and rest, and of the last he had taken as small a portion as was possible. Lucius seemed scarcely to be able to bear him out of his sight: when he was gone, he insisted upon Persis repeating to him again and again the holy words, to which she, too, listened with eagerness; and Persis thus repeating learnt herself to love the Son of God and to believe in Him.

Lucius was now on the high road to recovery, and it was settled that as soon as possible the whole family should be baptized.

Little had Astyrius thought when he came to Cæsarea Philippi, partly to visit his friend, partly to see the town itself, what work God had for him to do. Every spare moment was spent in instructing the children, and his heart was filled with thankfulness as he found in what good soil the holy seed was falling. Never had he been happier in his life than now, for nothing sanctifies or ennobles a friendship more than the fact that it has its foundation in the love of Christ.

## CHAP. VI.—PANIC.

"I have never asked you," said Astyrius, as they sat on the terrace looking westward, "wherefore you were so frightened the first night I came, and what made you take me for the god Pan."

The children all looked somewhat ashamed and Persis blushed; indeed, although they had learnt to believe in Christ, their faith was yet in its childhood, and we may doubt whether it might not be almost the work of a life time to shake off the superstitious fears which had been bred up in them. We know that this was one of the difficulties with

which the first missionaries had to contend, and that in many cases, finding it impossible to root out the old traditions and myths entirely, they let them remain: thus the heathen names of the days of the week were unaltered, and many a Christian festival was engrafted upon a heathen one. We know, for example, that our Valentine's day was originally a festival in honor of Juno Februata, in which the names of women were put into a box, and from which they were drawn by the men as chance happened to direct. The Christians converted this heathen cus-

tom into a habit of writing the names of the saints on slips of paper, drawing for them, and considering the saint whose name was drawn the patron of the drawer for the ensuing year. St. Valentine lived about the time of the present story, and perished in the Diocletian persecution.

"Every one fears the god Pan," said Persis, timidly. "And there are certainly strange things that happen about here. Indeed, I can scarcely believe myself that there is not such a being; though from what you say, he may be more a demon than a god."

"That I can well believe," said

and dreadful that when we went thither with nurse to sacrifice I trembled with fear at the sight. The cave itself is full of deep, dark water—so deep that none know how far it goes down into the earth, or where the slow black stream travels to. It is a cave of marvels; for the water comes from a pool far away yonder in Lebanon; and there have been those who have thrown chaff in at Phiala—for so is the place called—and it has floated hither."

"So it may be," said Astyrius. "I have heard of still more wondrous things; but I cannot see why that made you take me for Pan."

"But that is not the worst of it," said Julia, drawing close to Astyrius: "sometimes they throw some one into the grotto as a sacrifice to Pan, and we do not know whom the god may choose; but it is terrible to think it might be one of ourselves."

"Nay, but this is terrible;" cried Astyrius, horrified, not only as a Christian, but a Roman; for amongst both Greeks and Romans human sacrifices were rare, and much disliked. "Has no one testified against this sin?"

"Where would be the use?" said Rufus. "None but Christians would do so, and they are not strong enough: they would but be sacrificed themselves to the wrath of the people and of the priests."

Thus dealt not St. Paul when he stood up in the midst of Mars' Hill surrounded by the altars of Greece, and cried, "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by and beheld your devotions I found an altar with this inscription, To the Unknown God. Whom, therefore, ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you."

"And did not the people slay him for impiety?" asked Persis.

"Nay; some few mocked and others listened without obeying: but many clave unto him, for 'the word of the Lord is powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword.'"

A wistful look came over Persis' face.

"Oh, that I could believe fully!" she said, earnestly; "or, rather, that I could disbelieve what I have learnt! But if there be indeed no Pan—if the gods of Greece and Rome are no gods, whence is it that men universally believe in them? I have even heard my father say that in Egypt also he is worshipped, and how can I think so many different people and nations should have been misled?"

"They but groped in darkness; but upon us the light shined, and we who can say, 'Our Father,' need have no fear of these senseless duties. The very Greeks, as thou knowest, have laughed at the gods of Egypt, where even leeks, and garlic, and frogs were held sacred. Dost thou not know the lines—?"

But as he was about to repeat them a noise came from the house, and in great haste the old man Pudens hurried into the garden.

## CHAP. VII.—PUDENS.

The Centurion and his children were much surprised to find



"SEE YOU NOT THE TEMPLE OF PAN?"

the Roman. "A demon he must surely be if he is aught, for our God is not a God of fear but of love. But what are the strange things that you have heard of?"

"See you not the temple of Pan which stands on yonder high cliff?"

"The Grecian temple—yes! But what of that? I have often seen the like in other lands."

"That can scarcely be, noble Astyrius," said Persis, shaking her head gravely. "And much I marvel that you have not before heard of the wonders of this temple. Beneath it there is a cave, with a high, dim roof, so gloomy

"It is said he haunts this garden," answered Persis, speaking in a low, frightened voice; "and whenever he appears a strange fear seizes upon men, so that they cannot help themselves, but must fly, for he delights to frighten people."

For it is from this very superstition that our word "panic" came; and, strangely enough, even at the present day the inhabitants of the neighborhood of Baneas declare they often see strange sights, and hear strange sounds, and feel terrified without apparent cause, so difficult is it to root out old ideas.