

For thou wert mad for love, and a frenzied lover is the worst of fools."

Barabbas still kept silence.

"If innocence hath any merit," continued the voice behind the grating anxiously, "then perchance the choice will fall on me! For am I not an innocent man? The God of my fathers knoweth that my hands are not stained with the blood of the virtuous; I slew no Pharisee! A little gold was all I sought"——

"And did'st thou not take it?" rejoined Barabbas suddenly and with scorn.—"Thou hypocrite! Did'st thou not rob the Pharisee of all he had upon him even to his last jewel? Did not the guard capture thee in the very act of breaking with thy teeth the gold band from his arm ere the breath left his body? Cease thy prating! Thou art the worst thief in Jerusalem and thou knowest it!"

There was a sound behind the bars as of something between a grunt and a snarl, and the squat hand thrust itself through with vicious suddenness, to be as suddenly withdrawn. A pause ensued.

"No food all day!" moaned the voice again presently.—"And not a drop of water! Surely if they come not I shall die! I shall die in this darkness,—this dense pitch blackness"—and the faint accents grew feebly shrill with fear.—"Dost thou hear me, thou accursed Barabbas? I shall die!"

"And so there will be an end of thee," returned Barabbas indifferently.—"And those who hoard gold in the city can sleep safely henceforth with open doors!"

Out came the ugly hand again, this time clenched, giving in its repulsive shape and expression a perfect idea of the villainous character of its unseen owner.

"Thou art a devil, Barabbas!" and the shadowy outline of a livid face and wild hair appeared for an instant against the grating.—"And I swear to thee I will live on, if only in the hope of seeing thee crucified!"

Barabbas held his peace, and dragged himself and his clanking chains away from his spiteful fellow-prisoner's vicinity. Lifting his eyes distrustfully he peered upward with a smarting sense of pain,—then heaved a deep sigh of relief as he saw that the burning arrow line of white radiance no longer lit the cell. It had changed to a beam of soft and dusky crimson.