

Above the heads of the multitude furniture and rich fabrics passed from hand to hand until they tumbled into the immense furnace, which whirled its flames higher and higher, crowned by a white and luminous smoke.

It was a holocaust in honour of the dead and silent gods on the Acropolis. Houses seemed to turn themselves inside out to fling their adornments and riches upon the fire. The men pursued their work of destruction silently and gloomily; but the women seemed mad, and they danced around the huge bonfire, dishevelled, screaming, their eyes bulging from their sockets, hypnotized, caressing the flames with their garments, intoxicated by the glare, scratching their faces unconscious of their acts, and bellowing curses with mouths foaming with rage. Crazed by the infernal round, unable to resist the fascination of the lachrymose flames, one of them sprang and fell into the fire. Her hair and clothing blazed for an instant like a torch, and she sank among the white-hot coals. Another hurled into the roaring crematory, as if it were a ball, the babe she had borne in her arms clinging to her empty breast, and then, as if repentant for her crime, she followed the child into the burning pile.

The conflagration had extended to the wooden roofs of the houses around the Forum. A chaplet of flame began to inwreath the square. The heat and smoke were stifling, and the furniture seemed to travel automatically above the heads of the crowd toward the incandescent kiln through the dense sooty atmosphere. Lachares and his elegant friends began to talk of death. Those effeminate beings discussed with sublime tranquillity the manner of their end. They