

bold gaze to its amber flame radiating through the vast blue dome of ether,—but here and now, that thin shaft of brightness pouring slantwise through the narrow slit in the wall which alone served as an air-passage to the foul den in which he was caged seemed an aggression and a mockery. He made querulous complaint of it, and huddling on his bed of dirty straw in the furthest darkness refreshed himself anew with curses. Against God and Fate and man he railed in thick-throated blasphemies, twisting and turning from side to side and clutching now and again in sheer ferocity at the straw on which he lay. He was alone, yet not altogether lonely, for close beside him where he crouched like a sullen beast in the corner there was a crossed grating of thick iron bars, the only air-aperture to the neighbouring cell, and through this there presently came a squat grimy hand. After feeling about for a while, this hand at last found and cautiously pulled the edge of his garment, and a faint hoarse voice called him by name.

“Barabbas!”

He turned with a swift savage movement that set his chains clanking dismally.

“What now?”

“They have forgotten us,” whined the voice. “Since early morning they have brought no food. I am perishing with hunger and thirst! Ah, I would I had never seen thy face, Barabbas, or had aught to do with thine evil plotting!”

Barabbas made no answer.

“Knowest thou not,” went on his invisible fellow-felon, “what season this is in the land?”

“How should I know!” retorted Barabbas disdainfully. “What are seasons to me? Is it a year or years since we were brought hither? If thou can’st tell, I cannot.”

“’Tis eighteen months since thou did’st slay the Pharisee.” replied his neighbour with marked malignity of accent,—“And had it not been for that wicked deed of thine, we might have missed this present wretchedness. Verily it is a marvel we have lived so long, for look you, now it is Pass-over.”

Barabbas uttered no word, either of surprise or interest.

“Rememberest thou the custom of the Feast?” pursued the speaker, “How that one captive chosen by the people shall be set at liberty? Would that it might be one of us, Barabbas! There were ten of our company,—ten as goodly men as ever were born in Judæa, always excepting thee.