

# BARABBAS

---

## CHAPTER. I.

A LONG sultry Syrian day was drawing near its close.

The heavy heat was almost insupportable, and a poisonous stench oozed up from the damp earth-floors of the Jewish prison, charging what little air there was with a deadly sense of suffocation. Down in the lowest dungeons complete darkness reigned, save in one of the cells allotted to the worst criminals; there, all through the slow hours a thin white line of light had persistently pierced the thick obscurity. It was the merest taper-flame reflection of the outside glowing Eastern sky, yet narrow as it was, it had vexed the eyes of the solitary prisoner on whom it fell, and he had turned from its hot flash with a savage curse and groan. Writhing back as far as his chains would allow, he covered his face with his manacled hands, pressing his eyelids down, and gnawing his lips in restless fury till his mouth was bitter with the taste of his own blood. He was seized with such impotent rages often. He mentally fought against that poignant light-beam cutting like a sword through deep darkness,—he regarded it as a positive foe and daily source of nervous irritation. It marked for him the dismal time,—when it shone he knew it was day,—when it vanished, it was night. Otherwise, whether minutes or hours passed, he could not tell. His existence had merged into one protracted phase of dull suffering, varied with occasional fits of maniac ferocity which only relieved him for the moment and left him more stupefied and brutish than before. He had no particular consciousness of anything except of that needle-pointed ray which, falling obliquely upon him, dazzled and hurt his eyes. He could have endured the glare of the Syrian sun in the free and open country,—no one better than he could have turned a