

VIVIA PERPETUA

A tribune with a band of soldiery
Entered our cell, and would have had us bound
In harsher durance, fearing our escape
By fraud or witchcraft ; but Perpetua,
Facing him gently with a noble note
Of wonder in her voice, and on her lips
A lingering smile of mournful irony :
' Sir, are ye not unwise to harass us,
And rob us of our natural food and rest ?
Should ye not rather tend us with soft care,
And so provide a comely spectacle ?
We shall not honour Cæsar's birthday well,
If we be waste and weak, a piteous crew,
Poor playthings for your proud and pampered
beasts.'

The noisy tribune, whether touched indeed,
Or by her grave and tender grace abashed,
Muttered and stormed a while, and then withdrew.
The short night passed in wakeful prayer for some,
For others in brief sleep, broken by dreams
And spiritual visitations. Earliest dawn
Found us arisen, and Perpetua,
Moving about with smiling lips, soft-tongued,
Besought us to take food ; lest so, she said,
For all the strength and courage of our hearts,
Our bodies should fall faint. We heard without,