

caused partly by the surging blood in his brain, and partly by the echo of a sound which with every onward step grew more distinct,—a clamour of angry voices and shouting in the midst of which he fancied he heard his own name,

"Barabbas! Barabbas!"

Startled, he looked inquiringly into the faces of the soldiers that surrounded him, but their impassive bronze-like features betrayed no intelligence. Vainly he strove to listen more attentively,—the clanking weapons of his guard and the measured thud of their feet on the stone pavement prevented him from catching the real purport of those distant outcries. Yet surely,—surely there was another shout—

"Barabbas! Barabbas!"

A sickening horror suddenly seized him,—a swift and awful comprehension of his true position. The mob, relentless in all ages, were evidently clamouring for his death, and were even now preparing to make sport of his torments. Nothing more glorious to a brutal populace than the physical agony of a helpless fellow-creature,—nothing more laughter-moving than to watch the despair, the pain, and the writhing last struggle of a miserable human wretch condemned to perish by a needlessly slow and barbarous torture. Thinking of this, great drops of sweat bathed his brow, and as he staggered feebly on, he prayed dumbly for some sudden end,—prayed that his hot and throbbing blood might rush in merciful full force to a vital centre of his brain that so he might fall into oblivion swiftly like a stone falling into the sea. Anything—anything, rather than face the jeers and the mockery of a pitiless multitude trooping forth as to a feast to see him die!

Closer and closer came the hubbub and roar, interspersed with long pauses of comparative stillness, and it was during one of these pauses that his enforced journey came to an end. Turning sharply round the last corner of the underground passage, the soldiers tramped out into the daylight, and ascended several wide marble steps, afterwards crossing an open circular court, empty and cool in the silver-grey hues of early dawn. Finally passing under a columnar arch, they entered a vast Hall, which was apparently divided into two square spaces,—one almost clear, save for a few prominent figures that stood forth in statuesque outlines against a background of dark purple hangings fringed with gold,—the other densely crowded with people who were only kept from