

for the Emperor himself, who was proceeding on foot, and as far as was practicable, *incoq.*, to inspect the fish market.

Vitellius shuffled along with the lagging step of an infirm and bloated old man. His face was pale and flabby, his eye dim, though sparkling at intervals with some little remnant of the rosy wit and pliant humor that had made him the favorite of three emperors ere he himself attained the purple. Supported by two freedmen, preceded and followed only by a file of lictors, and attended by three or four slaves, Cæsar was taking his short walk in the hopes of acquiring some little appetite for dinner; what locality so favorable for the furtherance of this object as the fish-market, where the imperial glutton could feast his eyes, if nothing else, on the choicest dainties of the deep? He was so seldom seen abroad in Rome, that the Briton could not forbear following him with his glance, while his new friend, relaxing his hold with great caution, whispered once more in his ear:

"Ay, look well at him, man, and give Jove thanks thou art not an emperor. There's a shape for the purple! There's a head to carry a diadem! Well, well, for all he's so white and flabby now, like a Lucrine turbot, he could drive a chariot once, and hold his own at sword and buckler with the best of them. They say he can drink as well as ever still. Not that he was a match for Nero in his best days, even at the game. Ay, ay, they may talk as they will: we've never had an emperor like him before nor since. Wine, women, shows, sacrifices, wild-beast fights;—a legion of men all engaged in the circus at once! Such a friend as he was to our trade."

"And that trade?" inquired the Briton good humouredly enough, now his hands were free: "I think I can guess it without asking too many questions."

"No need to guess," replied the other. "I'm not ashamed of my trade, nor of my name neither. Maybe you have heard of Hirpinus, the gladiator? Tuscan born, free Roman citizen, and willing to match himself with any man of his weight, on foot or on horseback, blindfold or half-armed, in or out of a war-chariot, with two swords, sword and buckler, or sword or spear. Any weapon, and every weapon, always excepting the net and the noose. Those I can't bear talking about—to my mind they are not fair fighting. But what need I tell you all about it?" he added, running his eye over the slave's powerful frame. "I must surely have seen you before. You look as if you belonged to the family yourself!"

The slave smiled, not insensible to the compliment.

"'Tis a manlier way of getting bread than most of the employments I see practised in Rome," was his reply, though he spoke more to himself than his companion. "A man might die a worse death than in the amphitheatre," he added, meditatively.

"A worse death!" echoed Hirpinus. "He could scarce die a better! Think of the rows of heads one upon another piled up like apples to the very awnings. Think of the patricians and senators vagering their collars and bracelets, and their sesterces in millions, on the strength of your arm, and the point of your blade. Think of your own vigour and manhood, trained till you feel as strong as an elephant, and as lithic as a panther, with an honest wooden buckler on your arm, and two feet of pliant steel in your hand, as you defile by Cæsar and bid him "Good-morrow, from those who have come here to die!" Think of the tough bout with your antagonist, foot to foot, hand to hand, eye to eye, feeling his blade with your own (why swordsman, lad, can fonce as well in the dark as the daylight!), foiling his passes, drawing his attack, learning his foins, watching your opportunity; when you catch it at last,

in your dash like a wild cat, and the guard of your sword rings sharp and true against the breast-bone, and he goes over backwards on the sand!"

"And if he gets the opportunity first?" asked the slave, interested in spite of himself at the enthusiasm which carried him irresistibly along with it. "If your guard is an inch too high, your return a thought too slow? If you go backwards on the sand, with the hilt at your breast-bone, and the two feet of steel in your bosom? How does it feel then?"

"Faith, lad, you must cross the Styx, to have that question fairly answered," replied the other. "I have had no such experience yet. When it comes I shall know how to meet it. But this talking makes a man thirsty, and the sun is hot enough to bake a negro here. Come with me, lad! I know a shady nook, where we can pierce a skin of wine, and afterwards play a game at quoits, or have a bout of wrestling, to while away the afternoon."

The slave was nothing loth. Besides the debt of gratitude he owed for preservation from a serious danger, there was something in his new friend's rough, good-humoured, and athletic manhood that won on the Briton's favour. Hirpinus, with even more than their fierce courage, had less than the usual brutality of his class, and possessed besides a sort of quaint and careless good humour, by no means rare among the athletes of every time, which found its way at once to the natural sympathies of the slave. They started off accordingly, on the most amicable terms, in search of that refreshment which a few hours' exposure to an Italian sun rendered very desirable; but the crowd had not yet cleared off, and their progress was necessarily somewhat slow, notwithstanding that the throng of passengers gave way readily enough before two such stalwart and athletic forms.

Hirpinus thought it incumbent on him to take the Briton, as it were, under his protection, and to point out to him the different objects of interest, and the important personages, to be seen at that hour in the streets of the capital, totally irrespective of the fact, that his pupil was as well instructed on these points as himself. But the gladiator dearly loved a listener, and, truth to tell, was extremely diffuse in his narratives when he had got one to his mind. These generally turned on his own physical prowess, and his deadly exploits in the amphitheatre, which he was by no means disposed to underrate. These are some really brave men who are also boasters, and Hirpinus was one of them.

He was in the midst of a long dissertation on the beauties of an encounter fought out between naked combatants, armed only with the sword, and was explaining at great length a certain fatal thrust outside his antagonist's guard, and over his elbow, which he affirmed to be his own invention, and irresistible by any parry yet discovered, when the slave felt his gown plucked by a female hand, and turning sharply round was somewhat disconcerted to find himself face to face with Valeria's waiting maid.

"You are wanted," said she unceremoniously, and with an imperious gesture. "You are to come to my lady this instant. Make haste, man; she cannot brook waiting."

Myrrhina pointed while she spoke to where a closed litter borne aloft by four tall Libanian slaves, had stopped the traffic, and already become the nucleus of a crowd. A white hand peeped through its curtains, as the slave approached, surprised and somewhat abashed at this unexpected appeal.

Hirpinus looked on with grave approval the while. Arriving close beneath the litter, of which the curtain was now open, the slave paused and made a graceful obeisance; then,

drawing himself up proudly, stood erect before it, looking unconsciously his best, in the pride of his youth and beauty. Valeria's cheek was paler than usual, and her attitude more languid, but her grey eyes sparkled, and a smile played round her mouth as she addressed him.

"Myrrhina tells me that you are the man who brought a basket of flowers to my house this morning from Licinius. Why did you not wait to carry back my salutations to my kinsman?"

The color mounted to the slave's brow as he thought of Automedon's insolence, but he only replied humbly, "Had I known it was your wish, lady, I had been standing in your porch till now."

She marked his rising color, and attributed it to the effect of her own dazzling beauty.

"Myrrhina knew you at once in the crowd," said she, graciously; "and indeed yours is a face and figure not easily mistaken in Rome. I should recognize you myself anywhere now."

She paused, expecting a suitable reply, but the slave, albeit not insensible to the compliment, only blushed again and was silent.

Valeria, meanwhile, whose motives in summoning him to her litter had been in the first instance of simple curiosity to see the stalwart barbarian who had so excited Myrrhina's admiration, and whom that sharp-sighted damsel had recognized in an instant amongst the populace, now found herself pleased and interested by the quiet demeanor and noble bearing of this foreign slave. She had always been susceptible to manly beauty, and here she beheld it in its noblest type. She was rapacious of admiration in all quarters; and here she could not but flatter herself she gathered an undoubted tribute to the power of her charms. She owned all a woman's interest in anything that had a spice of mystery or romance, and a woman's unfailing instinct in discovering high birth and a gentle breeding under every disguise; and here she found a delightful puzzle in the manner and appearance of her kinsman's messenger, whose position seemed so at variance with his looks. She had never in her life laid the slightest restraint on her thoughts, and but little on her actions—she had never left a purpose unfulfilled, nor a wish ungratified—but a strange and new feeling, at which even her courageous nature quailed, seemed springing up in her heart while she gazed with half-closed eyes at the Briton, and hesitated to confess, even to herself, that she had never seen such a man as this in her life before.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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