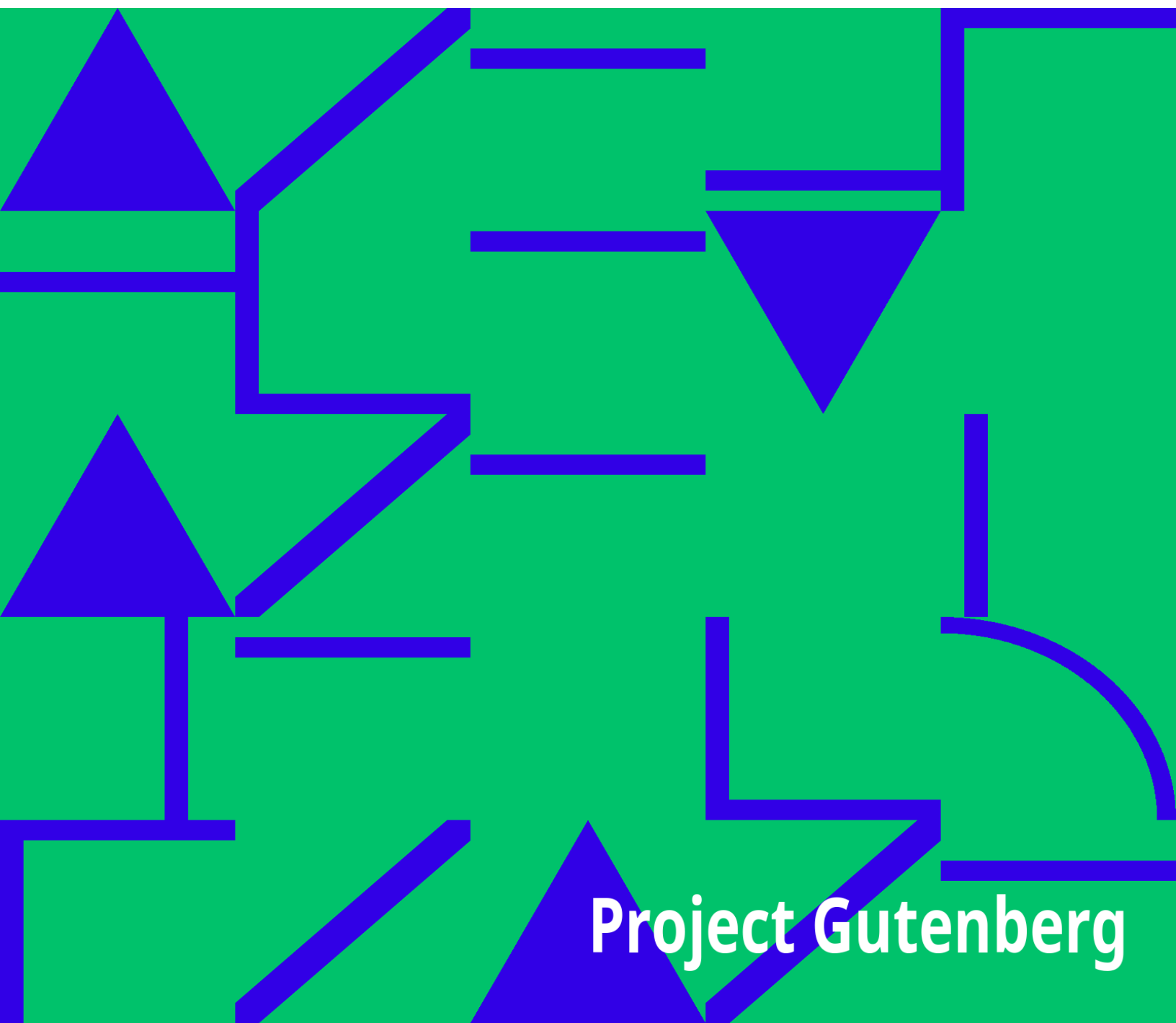


Androcles and the Lion

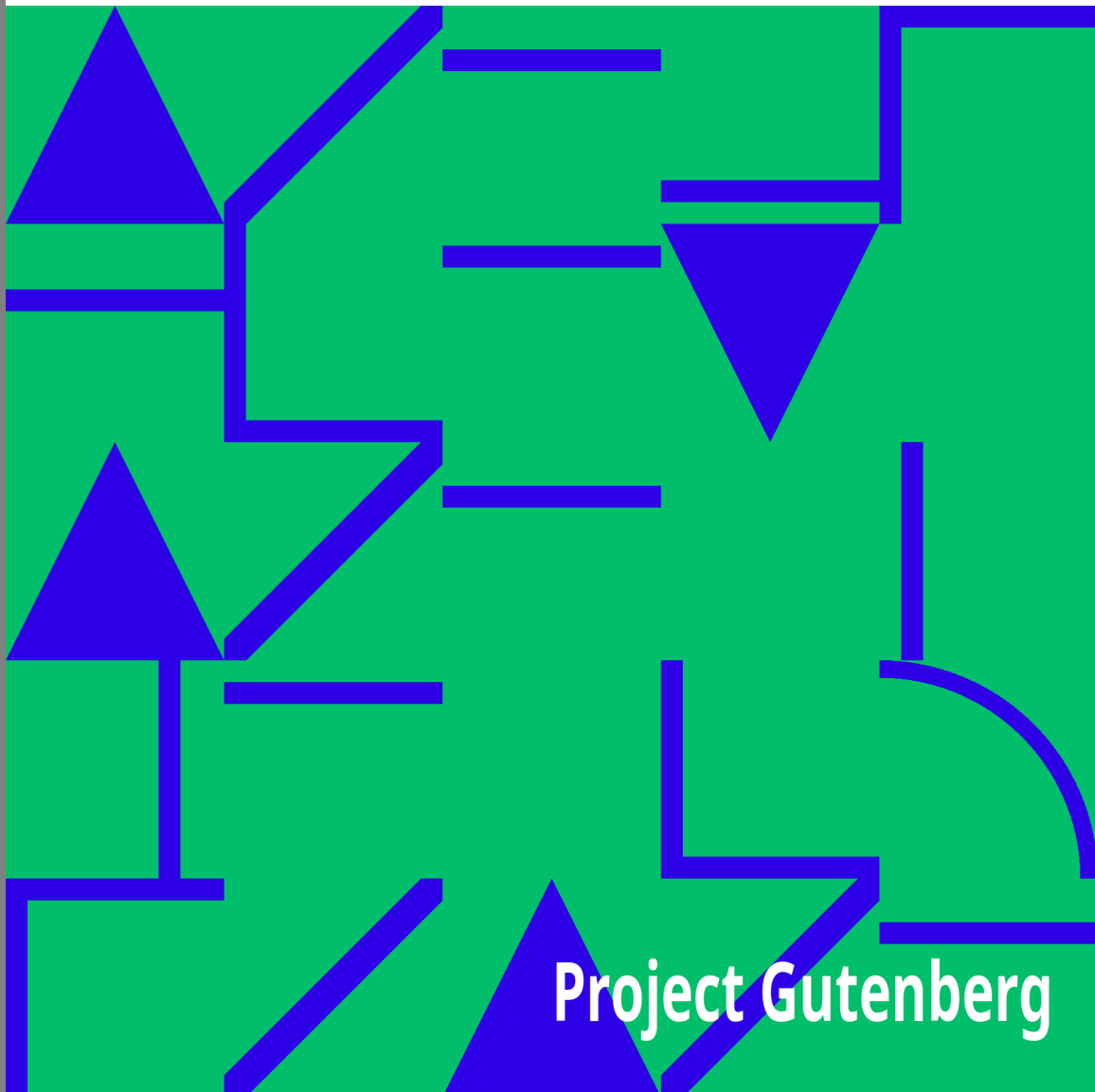
Bernard Shaw



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Androcles and the Lion

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AND THE LION ***

ANDROCLES AND THE LION

by Bernard Shaw

1912

Contents

PROLOGUE

ACT I

ACT II

PROLOGUE

Overture; forest sounds, roaring of lions, Christian hymn faintly.

A jungle path. A lion's roar, a melancholy suffering roar, comes from the jungle. It is repeated nearer. The lion limps from the jungle on three legs, holding up his right forepaw, in which a huge thorn sticks. He sits down and contemplates it. He licks it. He shakes it. He tries to extract it by scraping it along the ground, and hurts himself worse. He roars piteously. He licks it again. Tears drop from his eyes. He limps painfully off the path and lies down under the trees, exhausted with pain. Heaving a long sigh, like wind in a trombone, he goes to sleep.

Androcles and his wife Megæra come along the path. He is a small, thin, ridiculous little man who might be any age from thirty to fifty-five. He has sandy hair, watery compassionate blue eyes, sensitive nostrils, and a very presentable forehead; but his good points go no further; his arms and legs and back, though wiry of their kind, look shrivelled and starved. He carries a big bundle, is very poorly clad, and seems tired and hungry.

His wife is a rather handsome pampered slattern, well fed and in the prime of life. She has nothing to carry, and has a stout stick to help her along.

MEGAERA.

(suddenly throwing down her stick) I won't go another step.

ANDROCLES.

(pleading wearily) Oh, not again, dear. What's the good of stopping every two miles and saying you won't go another step? We must get on to the next village before night. There are wild beasts in this wood: lions, they say.

MEGAERA.

I don't believe a word of it. You are always threatening me with wild beasts

to make me walk the very soul out of my body when I can hardly drag one foot before another. We haven't seen a single lion yet.

ANDROCLES.

Well, dear, do you want to see one?

MEGAERA.

(tearing the bundle from his back) You cruel beast, you don't care how tired I am, or what becomes of me *(she throws the bundle on the ground)*: always thinking of yourself. Self! self! self! always yourself! *(She sits down on the bundle)*.

ANDROCLES.

(sitting down sadly on the ground with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands) We all have to think of ourselves occasionally, dear.

MEGAERA.

A man ought to think of his wife sometimes.

ANDROCLES.

He can't always help it, dear. You make me think of you a good deal. Not that I blame you.

MEGAERA.

Blame me! I should think not indeed. Is it my fault that I'm married to you?

ANDROCLES.

No, dear: that is my fault.

MEGAERA.

That's a nice thing to say to me. Aren't you happy with me?

ANDROCLES.

I don't complain, my love.

MEGAERA.

You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

ANDROCLES.

I am, my dear.

MEGAERA.

You're not: you glory in it.

ANDROCLES.

In what, darling?

MEGAERA.

In everything. In making me a slave, and making yourself a laughing-stock. Its not fair. You get me the name of being a shrew with your meek ways, always talking as if butter wouldn't melt in your mouth. And just because I look a big strong woman, and because I'm good-hearted and a bit hasty, and because you're always driving me to do things I'm sorry for afterwards, people say "Poor man: what a life his wife leads him!" Oh, if they only knew! And you think I don't know. But I do, I do, (*screaming*) I do.

ANDROCLES.

Yes, my dear: I know you do.

MEGAERA.

Then why don't you treat me properly and be a good husband to me?

ANDROCLES.

What can I do, my dear?

MEGAERA.

What can you do! You can return to your duty, and come back to your home and your friends, and sacrifice to the gods as all respectable people do, instead of having us hunted out of house and home for being dirty, disreputable, blaspheming atheists.

ANDROCLES.

I'm not an atheist, dear: I am a Christian.

MEGAERA.

Well, isn't that the same thing, only ten times worse? Everybody knows that the Christians are the very lowest of the low.

ANDROCLES.

Just like us, dear.

MEGAERA.

Speak for yourself. Don't you dare to compare me to common people. My father owned his own public-house; and sorrowful was the day for me when you first came drinking in our bar.

ANDROCLES.

I confess I was addicted to it, dear. But I gave it up when I became a Christian.

MEGAERA.

You'd much better have remained a drunkard. I can forgive a man being addicted to drink: its only natural; and I don't deny I like a drop myself sometimes. What I can't stand is your being addicted to Christianity. And what's worse again, your being addicted to animals. How is any woman to keep her house clean when you bring in every stray cat and lost cur and lame duck in the whole countryside? You took the bread out of my mouth to feed them: you know you did: don't attempt to deny it.

ANDROCLES.

Only when they were hungry and you were getting too stout, dearie.

MEGAERA.

Yes, insult me, do. (*Rising*) Oh! I won't bear it another moment. You used to sit and talk to those dumb brute beasts for hours, when you hadn't a word for me.

ANDROCLES.

They never answered back, darling. (*He rises and again shoulders the bundle*).

MEGAERA.

Well, if you're fonder of animals than of your own wife, you can live with them here in the jungle. I've had enough of them and enough of you. I'm going back. I'm going home.

ANDROCLES.

(*barring the way back*) No, dearie: don't take on like that. We can't go back. We've sold everything: we should starve; and I should be sent to Rome and thrown to the lions—

MEGAERA.

Serve you right! I wish the lions joy of you. (*Screaming*) Are you going to get out of my way and let me go home?

ANDROCLES.

No, dear—

MEGAERA.

Then I'll make my way through the forest; and when I'm eaten by the wild beasts you'll know what a wife you've lost. (*She dashes into the jungle and nearly falls over the sleeping lion*). Oh! Oh! Andy! Andy! (*She totters back and collapses into the arms of Androcles, who, crushed by her weight, falls on his bundle*).

ANDROCLES.

(*extracting himself from beneath her and slapping her hands in great anxiety*) What is it, my precious, my pet? What's the matter? (*He raises her head. Speechless with terror, she points in the direction of the sleeping lion. He steals cautiously towards the spot indicated by Megæra. She rises with an effort and totters after him*).

MEGAERA.

No, Andy: you'll be killed. Come back.

The lion utters a long snoring sigh. Androcles sees the lion and recoils fainting into the arms of Megæra, who falls back on the bundle. They roll apart and lie staring in terror at one another. The lion is heard groaning heavily in the jungle.

ANDROCLES.

(*whispering*) Did you see? A lion.

MEGAERA.

(*despairing*) The gods have sent him to punish us because you're a Christian. Take me away, Andy. Save me.

ANDROCLES.

(*rising*) Meggy: there's one chance for you. It'll take him pretty nigh twenty minutes to eat me (*I'm rather stringy and tough*) and you can escape in less time than that.

MEGAERA.

Oh, don't talk about eating. (*The lion rises with a great groan and limps towards them*). Oh! (*She faints*).

ANDROCLES.

(*quaking, but keeping between the lion and Megæra*) Don't you come near my wife, do you hear? (*The lion groans. Androcles can hardly stand for*

trembling). Meggy: run. Run for your life. If I take my eye off him, its all up. *(The lion holds up his wounded paw and flaps it piteously before Androcles)*. Oh, he's lame, poor old chap! He's got a thorn in his paw. A frightfully big thorn. *(Full of sympathy)* Oh, poor old man! Did um get an awful thorn into um's tootsums wootsums? Has it made um too sick to eat a nice little Christian man for um's breakfast? Oh, a nice little Christian man will get um's thorn out for um; and then um shall eat the nice Christian man and the nice Christian man's nice big tender wifey pifey. *(The lion responds by moans of self-pity)*. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Now, now *(taking the paw in his hand)* um is not to bite and not to scratch, not even if it hurts a very, very little. Now make velvet paws. That's right. *(He pulls gingerly at the thorn. The lion, with an angry yell of pain, jerks back his paw so abruptly that Androcles is thrown on his back)*. Steadeeee! Oh, did the nasty cruel little Christian man hurt the sore paw? *(The lion moans assentingly but apologetically)*. Well, one more little pull and it will be all over. Just one little, little, leetle pull; and then um will live happily ever after. *(He gives the thorn another pull. The lion roars and snaps his jaws with a terrifying clash)*. Oh, mustn't frighten um's good kind doctor, um's affectionate nurse. That didn't hurt at all: not a bit. Just one more. Just to show how the brave big lion can bear pain, not like the little crybaby Christian man. Oopsh! *(The thorn comes out. The lion yells with pain, and shakes his paw wildly)*. That's it! *(Holding up the thorn)*. Now it's out. Now lick um's paw to take away the nasty inflammation. See? *(He licks his own hand. The lion nods intelligently and licks his paw industriously)*. Clever little liony-piony! Understands um's dear old friend Andy Wandy. *(The lion licks his face)*. Yes, kissums Andy Wandy. *(The lion, wagging his tail violently, rises on his hind legs and embraces Androcles, who makes a wry face and cries)* Velvet paws! Velvet paws! *(The lion draws in his claws)*. That's right. *(He embraces the lion, who finally takes the end of his tail in one paw, places that tight around Androcles' waist, resting it on his hip. Androcles takes the other paw in his hand, stretches out his arm, and the two waltz rapturously round and round and finally away through the jungle)*.

MEGAERA.

(who has revived during the waltz) Oh, you coward, you haven't danced with me for years; and now you go off dancing with a great brute beast that you haven't known for ten minutes and that wants to eat your own wife. Coward! Coward! Coward! *(She rushes off after them into the jungle)*.

ACT I

Evening. The end of three converging roads to Rome. Three triumphal arches span them where they debouch on a square at the gate of the city. Looking north through the arches one can see the campagna threaded by the three long dusty tracks. On the east and west sides of the square are long stone benches. An old beggar sits on the east side of the square, his bowl at his feet. Through the eastern arch a squad of Roman soldiers tramps along escorting a batch of Christian prisoners of both sexes and all ages, among them one Lavinia, a goodlooking resolute young woman, apparently of higher social standing than her fellow-prisoners. A centurion, carrying his vinewood cudgel, trudges alongside the squad, on its right, in command of it. All are tired and dusty; but the soldiers are dogged and indifferent, the Christians light-hearted and determined to treat their hardships as a joke and encourage one another.

A bugle is heard far behind on the road, where the rest of the cohort is following.

CENTURION.

(stopping) Halt! Orders from the Captain. *(They halt and wait)*. Now then, you Christians, none of your larks. The captain's coming. Mind you behave yourselves. No singing. Look respectful. Look serious, if you're capable of it. See that big building over there? That's the Coliseum. That's where you'll be thrown to the lions or set to fight the gladiators presently. Think of that; and it'll help you to behave properly before the captain. *(The Captain arrives)*. Attention! Salute! *(The soldiers salute)*.

A CHRISTIAN.

(cheerfully) God bless you, Captain.

THE CENTURION.

(scandalised) Silence!

The Captain, a patrician, handsome, about thirty-five, very cold and distinguished, very superior and authoritative, steps up on a stone seat at the west side of the square, behind the centurion, so as to dominate the others more effectually.

THE CAPTAIN.
Centurion.

THE CENTURION.
(*standing at attention and saluting*) Sir?

THE CAPTAIN.
(*speaking stiffly and officially*) You will remind your men, Centurion, that we are now entering Rome. You will instruct them that once inside the gates of Rome they are in the presence of the Emperor. You will make them understand that the lax discipline of the march cannot be permitted here. You will instruct them to shave every day, not every week. You will impress on them particularly that there must be an end to the profanity and blasphemy of singing Christian hymns on the march. I have to reprimand you, Centurion, for not only allowing this, but actually doing it yourself.

THE CENTURION.
The men march better, Captain.

THE CAPTAIN.
No doubt. For that reason an exception is made in the case of the march called Onward Christian Soldiers. This may be sung, except when marching through the forum or within hearing of the Emperor's palace; but the words must be altered to "Throw them to the Lions."

The Christians burst into shrieks of uncontrollable laughter, to the great scandal of the Centurion.

CENTURION.
Silence! Silen-n-n-n-nce! Where's your behavior? Is that the way to listen to an officer? (*To the Captain*) That's what we have to put up with from these Christians every day, sir. They're always laughing and joking something scandalous. They've no religion: that's how it is.

LAVINIA.

But I think the Captain meant us to laugh, Centurion. It was so funny.

CENTURION.

You'll find out how funny it is when you're thrown to the lions to-morrow. *(To the Captain, who looks displeased)* Beg pardon, Sir. *(To the Christians)* Silennnnce!

THE CAPTAIN.

You are to instruct your men that all intimacy with Christian prisoners must now cease. The men have fallen into habits of dependence upon the prisoners, especially the female prisoners, for cooking, repairs to uniforms, writing letters, and advice in their private affairs. In a Roman soldier such dependence is inadmissible. Let me see no more of it whilst we are in the city. Further, your orders are that in addressing Christian prisoners, the manners and tone of your men must express abhorrence and contempt. Any shortcoming in this respect will be regarded as a breach of discipline. *(He turns to the prisoners)* Prisoners.

CENTURION.

(fiercely) Prisonerrrrrs! Tention! Silence!

THE CAPTAIN.

I call your attention, prisoners, to the fact that you may be called on to appear in the Imperial Circus at any time from tomorrow onwards according to the requirements of the managers. I may inform you that as there is a shortage of Christians just now, you may expect to be called on very soon.

LAVINIA.

What will they do to us, Captain?

CENTURION.

Silence!

THE CAPTAIN.

The women will be conducted into the arena with the wild beasts of the Imperial Menagerie, and will suffer the consequences. The men, if of an age to bear arms, will be given weapons to defend themselves, if they choose, against the Imperial Gladiators.

LAVINIA.

Captain: is there no hope that this cruel persecution—

CENTURION.

(shocked) Silence! Hold your tongue, there. Persecution, indeed!

THE CAPTAIN.

(unmoved and somewhat sardonic) Persecution is not a term applicable to the acts of the Emperor. The Emperor is the Defender of the Faith. In throwing you to the lions he will be upholding the interests of religion in Rome. If you were to throw him to the lions, that would no doubt be persecution.

The Christians again laugh heartily.

CENTURION.

(horrified) Silence, I tell you! Keep silence there. Did anyone ever hear the like of this?

LAVINIA.

Captain: there will be nobody to appreciate your jokes when we are gone.

THE CAPTAIN.

(unshaken in his official delivery) I call the attention of the female prisoner Lavinia to the fact that as the Emperor is a divine personage, her imputation of cruelty is not only treason, but sacrilege. I point out to her further that there is no foundation for the charge, as the Emperor does not desire that any prisoner should suffer; nor can any Christian be harmed save through his or her own obstinacy. All that is necessary is to sacrifice to the gods: a simple and convenient ceremony effected by dropping a pinch of incense on the altar, after which the prisoner is at once set free. Under such circumstances you have only your own perverse folly to blame if you suffer. I suggest to you that if you cannot burn a morsel of incense as a matter of conviction, you might at least do so as a matter of good taste, to avoid shocking the religious convictions of your fellow citizens. I am aware that these considerations do not weigh with Christians; but it is my duty to call your attention to them in order that you may have no ground for complaining of your treatment, or of accusing the Emperor of cruelty when he is showing you the most signal clemency. Looked at from this point of

view, every Christian who has perished in the arena has really committed suicide.

LAVINIA.

Captain: your jokes are too grim. Do not think it is easy for us to die. Our faith makes life far stronger and more wonderful in us than when we walked in darkness and had nothing to live for. Death is harder for us than for you: the martyr's agony is as bitter as his triumph is glorious.

THE CAPTAIN.

(rather troubled, addressing her personally and gravely) A martyr, Lavinia, is a fool. Your death will prove nothing.

LAVINIA.

Then why kill me?

THE CAPTAIN.

I mean that truth, if there be any truth, needs no martyrs.

LAVINIA.

No; but my faith, like your sword, needs testing. Can you test your sword except by staking your life on it?

THE CAPTAIN.

(suddenly resuming his official tone) I call the attention of the female prisoner to the fact that Christians are not allowed to draw the Emperor's officers into arguments and put questions to them for which the military regulations provide no answer. *(The Christians titter)*.

LAVINIA.

Captain: how CAN you?

THE CAPTAIN.

I call the female prisoner's attention specially to the fact that four comfortable homes have been offered her by officers of this regiment, of which she can have her choice the moment she chooses to sacrifice as all well-bred Roman ladies do. I have no more to say to the prisoners.

CENTURION.

Dismiss! But stay where you are.

THE CAPTAIN.

Centurion: you will remain here with your men in charge of the prisoners until the arrival of three Christian prisoners in the custody of a cohort of the tenth legion. Among these prisoners you will particularly identify an armorer named Ferrovius, of dangerous character and great personal strength, and a Greek tailor reputed to be a sorcerer, by name Androcles. You will add the three to your charge here and march them all to the Coliseum, where you will deliver them into the custody of the master of the gladiators and take his receipt, countersigned by the keeper of the beasts and the acting manager. You understand your instructions?

CENTURION.

Yes, Sir.

THE CAPTAIN.

Dismiss. (He throws off his air of parade, and descends down from the perch. The Centurion seats on it and prepares for a nap, whilst his men stand at ease. The Christians sit down on the west side of the square, glad to rest. Lavinia alone remains standing to speak to the Captain).

LAVINIA.

Captain: is this man who is to join us the famous Ferrovius, who has made such wonderful conversions in the northern cities?

THE CAPTAIN.

Yes. We are warned that he has the strength of an elephant and the temper of a mad bull. Also that he is stark mad. Not a model Christian, it would seem.

LAVINIA.

You need not fear him if he is a Christian, Captain.

THE CAPTAIN.

(coldly) I shall not fear him in any case, Lavinia.

LAVINIA.

(her eyes dancing) How brave of you, Captain!

THE CAPTAIN.

You are right: it was silly thing to say. *(In a lower tone, humane and urgent)*
Lavinia: do Christians know how to love?

LAVINIA.

(*composedly*) Yes, Captain: they love even their enemies.

THE CAPTAIN.

Is that easy?

LAVINIA.

Very easy, Captain, when their enemies are as handsome as you.

THE CAPTAIN.

Lavinia: you are laughing at me.

LAVINIA.

At you, Captain! Impossible.

THE CAPTAIN.

Then you are flirting with me, which is worse. Don't be foolish.

LAVINIA.

But such a very handsome captain.

THE CAPTAIN.

Incorrigible! (*Urgently*) Listen to me. The men in that audience tomorrow will be the vilest of voluptuaries: men in whom the only passion excited by a beautiful woman is a lust to see her tortured and torn shrieking limb from limb. It is a crime to dignify that passion. It is offering yourself for violation by the whole rabble of the streets and the riff-raff of the court at the same time. Why will you not choose rather a kindly love and an honorable alliance?

LAVINIA.

They cannot violate my soul. I alone can do that by sacrificing to false gods.

THE CAPTAIN.

Sacrifice then to the true God. What does his name matter? We call him Jupiter. The Greeks call him Zeus. Call him what you will as you drop the incense on the altar flame: He will understand.

LAVINIA.

No. I couldn't. That is the strange thing, Captain, that a little pinch of incense should make all that difference. Religion is such a great thing that

when I meet really religious people we are friends at once, no matter what name we give to the divine will that made us and moves us. Oh, do you think that I, a woman, would quarrel with you for sacrificing to a woman god like Diana, if Diana meant to you what Christ means to me? No: we should kneel side by side before her altar like two children. But when men who believe neither in my god nor in their own—men who do not know the meaning of the word religion—when these men drag me to the foot of an iron statue that has become the symbol of the terror and darkness through which they walk, of their cruelty and greed, of their hatred of God and their oppression of man—when they ask me to pledge my soul before the people that this hideous idol is God, and that all this wickedness and falsehood is divine truth, I cannot do it, not if they could put a thousand cruel deaths on me. I tell you, it is physically impossible. Listen, Captain: did you ever try to catch a mouse in your hand? Once there was a dear little mouse that used to come out and play on my table as I was reading. I wanted to take him in my hand and caress him; and sometimes he got among my books so that he could not escape me when I stretched out my hand. And I did stretch out my hand; but it always came back in spite of me. I was not afraid of him in my heart; but my hand refused: it is not in the nature of my hand to touch a mouse. Well, Captain, if I took a pinch of incense in my hand and stretched it out over the altar fire, my hand would come back. My body would be true to my faith even if you could corrupt my mind. And all the time I should believe more in Diana than my persecutors have ever believed in anything. Can you understand that?

THE CAPTAIN.

(simply) Yes: I understand that. But my hand would not come back. The hand that holds the sword has been trained not to come back from anything but victory.

LAVINIA.

Not even from death?

THE CAPTAIN.

Least of all from death.

LAVINIA.

Then I must not come back either. A woman has to be braver than a soldier.

THE CAPTAIN.

Prouder, you mean.

LAVINIA.

(startled) Prouder! You call our courage pride!

THE CAPTAIN.

There is no such thing as courage: there is only pride. You Christians are the proudest devils on earth.

LAVINIA.

(hurt) Pray God then my pride may never become a false pride. *(She turns away as if she did not wish to continue the conversation, but softens and says to him with a smile)* Thank you for trying to save me from death.

THE CAPTAIN.

I knew it was no use; but one tries in spite of one's knowledge.

LAVINIA.

Something stirs, even in the iron breast of a Roman soldier!

THE CAPTAIN.

It will soon be iron again. I have seen many women die, and forgotten them in a week.

LAVINIA.

Remember me for a fortnight, handsome Captain. I shall be watching you, perhaps.

THE CAPTAIN.

From the skies? Do not deceive yourself, Lavinia. There is no future for you beyond the grave.

LAVINIA.

What does that matter? Do you think I am only running away from the terrors of life into the comfort of heaven? If there were no future, or if the future were one of torment, I should have to go just the same. The hand of God is upon me.

THE CAPTAIN.

Yes: when all is said, we are both patricians, Lavinia, and must die for our beliefs. Farewell. *(He offers her his hand. She takes it and presses it. He*

walks away, trim and calm. She looks after him for a moment, and cries a little as he disappears through the eastern arch. A trumpet-call is heard from the road through the western arch).

CENTURION.

(waking up and rising) Cohort of the tenth with prisoners. Two file out with me to receive them. *(He goes out through the western arch, followed by four soldiers in two files).*

Lentulus and Metellus come into the square from the west side with a little retinue of servants. Both are young courtiers, dressed in the extremity of fashion. Lentulus is slender, fair-haired, epicene. Metellus is manly, compactly built, olive skinned, not a talker.

LENTULUS.

Christians, by Jove! Let's chaff them.

METELLUS.

Awful brutes. If you knew as much about them as I do you wouldn't want to chaff them. Leave them to the lions.

LENTULUS.

(indicating Lavinia, who is still looking towards the arches after the captain). That woman's got a figure. *(He walks past her, staring at her invitingly, but she is preoccupied and is not conscious of him).* Do you turn the other cheek when they kiss you?

LAVINIA.

(startling) What?

LENTULUS.

Do you turn the other cheek when they kiss you, fascinating Christian?

LAVINIA.

Don't be foolish. *(To Metellus, who has remained on her right, so that she is between them)* Please don't let your friend behave like a cad before the soldiers. How are they to respect and obey patricians if they see them behaving like street boys? *(Sharply to Lentulus)* Pull yourself together, man. Hold your head up. Keep the corners of your mouth firm; and treat me respectfully. What do you take me for?

LENTULUS.

(irresolutely) Look here, you know: I—you—I—

LAVINIA.

Stuff! Go about your business. *(She turns decisively away and sits down with her comrades, leaving him disconcerted).*

METELLUS.

You didn't get much out of that. I told you they were brutes.

LENTULUS.

Plucky little filly! I suppose she thinks I care. *(With an air of indifference he strolls with Metellus to the east side of the square, where they stand watching the return of the Centurion through the western arch with his men, escorting three prisoners: Ferrovius, Androcles, and Spintho. Ferrovius is a powerful, choleric man in the prime of life, with large nostrils, staring eyes, and a thick neck: a man whose sensibilities are keen and violent to the verge of madness. Spintho is a debauchee, the wreck of a good-looking man gone hopelessly to the bad. Androcles is overwhelmed with grief, and is restraining his tears with great difficulty).*

THE CENTURION.

(to Lavinia) Here are some pals for you. This little bit is Ferrovius that you talk so much about. *(Ferrovius turns on him threateningly. The Centurion holds up his left forefinger in admonition).* Now remember that you're a Christian, and that you've got to return good for evil. *(Ferrovius controls himself convulsively; moves away from temptation to the east side near Lentulus; clasps his hands in silent prayer; and throws himself on his knees).* That's the way to manage them, eh! This fine fellow *(indicating Androcles, who comes to his left, and makes Lavinia a heartbroken salutation)* is a sorcerer. A Greek tailor, he is. A real sorcerer, too: no mistake about it. The tenth marches with a leopard at the head of the column. He made a pet of the leopard; and now he's crying at being parted from it. *(Androcles sniffs lamentably).* Ain't you, old chap? Well, cheer up, we march with a Billy goat *(Androcles brightens up)* that's killed two leopards and ate a turkey-cock. You can have him for a pet if you like. *(Androcles, quite consoled, goes past the Centurion to Lavinia, and sits down contentedly on the ground on her left).* This dirty dog *(collaring Spintho)* is a real Christian. He mobs the temples, he does *(at each*

accusation he gives the neck of Spintho's tunic a twist); he goes smashing things mad drunk, he does; he steals the gold vessels, he does; he assaults the priestesses, he does pah! (*He flings Spintho into the middle of the group of prisoners*). You're the sort that makes duty a pleasure, you are.

SPINTHO.

(*gasping*) That's it: strangle me. Kick me. Beat me. Revile me. Our Lord was beaten and reviled. That's my way to heaven. Every martyr goes to heaven, no matter what he's done. That is so, isn't it, brother?

CENTURION.

Well, if you're going to heaven, *I* don't want to go there. I wouldn't be seen with you.

LENTULUS.

Haw! Good! (*Indicating the kneeling Ferrovius*). Is this one of the turn-the-other-cheek gentlemen, Centurion?

CENTURION.

Yes, sir. Lucky for you too, sir, if you want to take any liberties with him.

LENTULUS.

(*to Ferrovius*) You turn the other cheek when you're struck, I'm told.

FERROVIUS.

(*slowly turning his great eyes on him*) Yes, by the grace of God, I do, now.

LENTULUS.

Not that you're a coward, of course; but out of pure piety.

FERROVIUS.

I fear God more than man; at least I try to.

LENTULUS.

Let's see. (*He strikes him on the cheek. Androcles makes a wild movement to rise and interfere; but Lavinia holds him down, watching Ferrovius intently. Ferrovius, without flinching, turns the other cheek. Lentulus, rather out of countenance, titters foolishly, and strikes him again feebly*). You know, I should feel ashamed if I let myself be struck like that, and took it lying down. But then I'm not a Christian: I'm a man. (*Ferrovius rises*

impressively and towers over him. Lentulus becomes white with terror; and a shade of green flickers in his cheek for a moment).

FERROVIUS.

(with the calm of a steam hammer) I have not always been faithful. The first man who struck me as you have just struck me was a stronger man than you: he hit me harder than I expected. I was tempted and fell; and it was then that I first tasted bitter shame. I never had a happy moment after that until I had knelt and asked his forgiveness by his bedside in the hospital. *(Putting his hands on Lentulus's shoulders with paternal weight)*. But now I have learnt to resist with a strength that is not my own. I am not ashamed now, nor angry.

LENTULUS.

(uneasily) Er—good evening. *(He tries to move away)*.

FERROVIUS.

(gripping his shoulders) Oh, do not harden your heart, young man. Come: try for yourself whether our way is not better than yours. I will now strike you on one cheek; and you will turn the other and learn how much better you will feel than if you gave way to the promptings of anger. *(He holds him with one hand and clenches the other fist)*.

LENTULUS.

Centurion: I call on you to protect me.

CENTURION.

You asked for it, sir. It's no business of ours. You've had two whacks at him. Better pay him a trifle and square it that way.

LENTULUS.

Yes, of course. *(To Ferrovius)* It was only a bit of fun, I assure you: I meant no harm. Here. *(He proffers a gold coin)*.

FERROVIUS.

(taking it and throwing it to the old beggar, who snatches it up eagerly, and hobbles off to spend it) Give all thou hast to the poor. Come, friend: courage! I may hurt your body for a moment; but your soul will rejoice in the victory of the spirit over the flesh. *(He prepares to strike)*.

ANDROCLES.

Easy, Ferrovius, easy: you broke the last man's jaw.

*Lentulus, with a moan of terror, attempts to fly; but
Ferrovius holds him ruthlessly.*

FERROVIUS.

Yes; but I saved his soul. What matters a broken jaw?

LENTULUS.

Don't touch me, do you hear? The law—

FERROVIUS.

The law will throw me to the lions tomorrow: what worse could it do were I to slay you? Pray for strength; and it shall be given to you.

LENTULUS.

Let me go. Your religion forbids you to strike me.

FERROVIUS.

On the contrary, it commands me to strike you. How can you turn the other cheek, if you are not first struck on the one cheek?

LENTULUS.

(almost in tears) But I'm convinced already that what you said is quite right. I apologize for striking you.

FERROVIUS.

(greatly pleased) My son: have I softened your heart? Has the good seed fallen in a fruitful place? Are your feet turning towards a better path?

LENTULUS.

(abjectly) Yes, yes. There's a great deal in what you say.

FERROVIUS.

(radiant) Join us. Come to the lions. Come to suffering and death.

LENTULUS.

(falling on his knees and bursting into tears) Oh, help me. Mother! mother!

FERROVIUS.

These tears will water your soul and make it bring forth good fruit, my son. God has greatly blessed my efforts at conversion. Shall I tell you a miracle

—yes, a miracle—wrought by me in Cappadocia? A young man—just such a one as you, with golden hair like yours—scoffed at and struck me as you scoffed at and struck me. I sat up all night with that youth wrestling for his soul; and in the morning not only was he a Christian, but his hair was as white as snow. (*Lentulus falls in a dead faint*). There, there: take him away. The spirit has overwrought him, poor lad. Carry him gently to his house; and leave the rest to heaven.

CENTURION.

Take him home. (*The servants, intimidated, hastily carry him out. Metellus is about to follow when Ferrovius lays his hand on his shoulder*).

FERROVIUS.

You are his friend, young man. You will see that he is taken safely home.

METELLUS.

(*with awestruck civility*) Certainly, sir. I shall do whatever you think best. Most happy to have made your acquaintance, I'm sure. You may depend on me. Good evening, sir.

FERROVIUS.

(*with unction*) The blessing of heaven upon you and him.

Metellus follows Lentulus. The Centurion returns to his seat to resume his interrupted nap. The deepest awe has settled on the spectators. Ferrovius, with a long sigh of happiness, goes to Lavinia, and offers her his hand.

LAVINIA.

(*taking it*) So that is how you convert people, Ferrovius.

FERROVIUS.

Yes: there has been a blessing on my work in spite of my unworthiness and my backslidings—all through my wicked, devilish temper. This man—

ANDROCLES.

(*hastily*) Don't slap me on the back, brother. She knows you mean me.

FERROVIUS.

How I wish I were weak like our brother here! for then I should perhaps be meek and gentle like him. And yet there seems to be a special providence that makes my trials less than his. I hear tales of the crowd scoffing and

casting stones and reviling the brethren; but when I come, all this stops: my influence calms the passions of the mob: they listen to me in silence; and infidels are often converted by a straight heart-to-heart talk with me. Every day I feel happier, more confident. Every day lightens the load of the great terror.

LAVINIA.

The great terror? What is that?

Ferrovius shakes his head and does not answer. He sits down beside her on her left, and buries his face in his hands in gloomy meditation.

ANDROCLES.

Well, you see, sister, he's never quite sure of himself. Suppose at the last moment in the arena, with the gladiators there to fight him, one of them was to say anything to annoy him, he might forget himself and lay that gladiator out.

LAVINIA.

That would be splendid.

FERROVIUS.

(springing up in horror) What!

ANDROCLES.

Oh, sister!

FERROVIUS.

Splendid to betray my master, like Peter! Splendid to act like any common blackguard in the day of my proving! Woman: you are no Christian. *(He moves away from her to the middle of the square, as if her neighborhood contaminated him).*

LAVINIA.

(laughing) You know, Ferrovius, I am not always a Christian. I don't think anybody is. There are moments when I forget all about it, and something comes out quite naturally, as it did then.

SPINTHO.

What does it matter? If you die in the arena, you'll be a martyr; and all

martyrs go to heaven, no matter what they have done. That's so, isn't it, Ferrovius?

FERROVIUS.

Yes: that is so, if we are faithful to the end.

LAVINIA.

I'm not so sure.

SPINTHO.

Don't say that. That's blasphemy. Don't say that, I tell you. We shall be saved, no matter WHAT we do.

LAVINIA.

Perhaps you men will all go into heaven bravely and in triumph, with your heads erect and golden trumpets sounding for you. But I am sure I shall only be allowed to squeeze myself in through a little crack in the gate after a great deal of begging. I am not good always: I have moments only.

SPINTHO.

You're talking nonsense, woman. I tell you, martyrdom pays all scores.

ANDROCLES.

Well, let us hope so, brother, for your sake. You've had a gay time, haven't you? with your raids on the temples. I can't help thinking that heaven will be very dull for a man of your temperament. (*Spintho snarls*). Don't be angry: I say it only to console you in case you should die in your bed tonight in the natural way. There's a lot of plague about.

SPINTHO.

(*rising and running about in abject terror*) I never thought of that. O Lord, spare me to be martyred. Oh, what a thought to put into the mind of a brother! Oh, let me be martyred today, now. I shall die in the night and go to hell. You're a sorcerer: you've put death into my mind. Oh, curse you, curse you! (*He tries to seize Androcles by the throat*).

FERROVIUS.

(*holding him in a grip of iron*) What's this, brother? Anger! Violence! Raising your hand to a brother Christian!

SPINTHO.

It's easy for you. You're strong. Your nerves are all right. But I'm full of disease. (*Ferrovius takes his hand from him with instinctive disgust*). I've drunk all my nerves away. I shall have the horrors all night.

ANDROCLES.

(*sympathetic*) Oh, don't take on so, brother. We're all sinners.

SPINTHO.

(*snivelling, trying to feel consoled*). Yes: I daresay if the truth were known, you're all as bad as I am.

LAVINIA.

(*contemptuously*) Does that comfort you?

FERROVIUS.

(*sternly*) Pray, man, pray.

SPINTHO.

What's the good of praying? If we're martyred we shall go to heaven, shan't we, whether we pray or not?

FERROVIUS.

What's that? Not pray! (*Seizing him again*) Pray this instant, you dog, you rotten hound, you slimy snake, you beastly goat, or—

SPINTHO.

Yes: beat me: kick me. I forgive you: mind that.

FERROVIUS.

(*spurning him with loathing*) Yah! (*Spintho reels away and falls in front of Ferrovius*).

ANDROCLES.

(*reaching out and catching the skirt of Ferrovius's tunic*) Dear brother: if you wouldn't mind—just for my sake—

FERROVIUS.

Well?

ANDROCLES.

Don't call him by the names of the animals. We've no right to. I've had

such friends in dogs. A pet snake is the best of company. I was nursed on goat's milk. Is it fair to them to call the like of him a dog or a snake or a goat?

FERROVIUS.

I only meant that they have no souls.

ANDROCLES.

(anxiously protesting) Oh, believe me, they have. Just the same as you and me. I really don't think I could consent to go to heaven if I thought there were to be no animals there. Think of what they suffer here.

FERROVIUS.

That's true. Yes: that is just. They will have their share in heaven.

SPINTHO.

(who has picked himself up and is sneaking past Ferrovius on his left, sneers derisively)!!

FERROVIUS.

(turning on him fiercely) What's that you say?

SPINTHO.

(cornering). Nothing.

FERROVIUS.

(clenching his fist) Do animals go to heaven or not?

SPINTHO.

I never said they didn't.

FERROVIUS.

(implacable) Do they or do they not?

SPINTHO.

They do: they do. *(Scrambling out of Ferrovius's reach)*. Oh, curse you for frightening me!

A bugle call is heard.

CENTURION.

(waking up) Tention! Form as before. Now then, prisoners, up with you and trot along spry. *(The soldiers fall in. The Christians rise)*.

A man with an ox goad comes running through the central arch.

THE OX DRIVER.

Here, you soldiers! clear out of the way for the Emperor.

THE CENTURION.

Emperor! Where's the Emperor? You ain't the Emperor, are you?

THE OX DRIVER.

It's the menagerie service. My team of oxen is drawing the new lion to the Coliseum. You clear the road.

CENTURION.

What! Go in after you in your dust, with half the town at the heels of you and your lion! Not likely. We go first.

THE OX DRIVER.

The menagerie service is the Emperor's personal retinue. You clear out, I tell you.

CENTURION.

You tell me, do you? Well, I'll tell you something. If the lion is menagerie service, the lion's dinner is menagerie service too. This (*pointing to the Christians*) is the lion's dinner. So back with you to your bullocks double quick; and learn your place. March. (*The soldiers start*). Now then, you Christians, step out there.

LAVINIA.

(*marching*) Come along, the rest of the dinner. I shall be the olives and anchovies.

ANOTHER CHRISTIAN.

(*laughing*) I shall be the soup.

ANOTHER. I shall be the fish.

ANOTHER. Ferrovius shall be the roast boar.

FERROVIUS.

(*heavily*) I see the joke. Yes, yes: I shall be the roast boar. Ha! ha! (*He laughs conscientiously and marches out with them*).

ANDROCLES.

I shall be the mince pie. (*Each announcement is received with a louder laugh by all the rest as the joke catches on*).

CENTURION.

(*scandalised*) Silence! Have some sense of your situation. Is this the way for martyrs to behave? (*To Spintho, who is quaking and loitering*) I know what you'll be at that dinner. You'll be the emetic. (*He shoves him rudely along*).

SPINTHO.

It's too dreadful: I'm not fit to die.

CENTURION.

Fitter than you are to live, you swine.

They pass from the square westward. The oxen, drawing a waggon with a great wooden cage and the lion in it, arrive through the central arch.

ACT II

Behind the Emperor's box at the Coliseum, where the performers assemble before entering the arena. In the middle a wide passage leading to the arena descends from the floor level under the imperial box. On both sides of this passage steps ascend to a landing at the back entrance to the box. The landing forms a bridge across the passage. At the entrance to the passage are two bronze mirrors, one on each side.

On the west side of this passage, on the right hand of any one coming from the box and standing on the bridge, the martyrs are sitting on the steps. Lavinia is seated half-way up, thoughtful, trying to look death in the face. On her left Androcles consoles himself by nursing a cat. Ferrovius stands behind them, his eyes blazing, his figure stiff with intense resolution. At the foot of the steps crouches Spintho, with his head clutched in his hands, full of horror at the approach of martyrdom.

On the east side of the passage the gladiators are standing and sitting at ease, waiting, like the Christians, for their turn in the arena. One (*Retiarius*) is a nearly naked man with a net and a trident. Another (*Secutor*) is in armor with a sword. He carries a helmet with a barred visor. The editor of the gladiators sits on a chair a little apart from them.

The Call Boy enters from the passage.

THE CALL BOY.

Number six. *Retiarius* versus *Secutor*.

The gladiator with the net picks it up. The gladiator with the helmet puts it on; and the two go into the arena, the net thrower taking out a little brush and arranging his hair as he goes, the other tightening his straps and shaking his shoulders loose. Both look at themselves in the mirrors before they enter the passage.

LAVINIA.

Will they really kill one another?

SPINTHO.

Yes, if the people turn down their thumbs.

THE EDITOR.

You know nothing about it. The people indeed! Do you suppose we would kill a man worth perhaps fifty talents to please the riffraff? I should like to catch any of my men at it.

SPINTHO.

I thought—

THE EDITOR.

(contemptuously) You thought! Who cares what you think? You'll be killed all right enough.

SPINTHO.

(groans and again hides his face)!!! Then is nobody ever killed except us poor—

LAVINIA.

Christians?

THE EDITOR.

If the vestal virgins turn down their thumbs, that's another matter. They're ladies of rank.

LAVINIA.

Does the Emperor ever interfere?

THE EDITOR.

Oh, yes: he turns his thumbs up fast enough if the vestal virgins want to have one of his pet fighting men killed.

ANDROCLES.

But don't they ever just only pretend to kill one another? Why shouldn't you pretend to die, and get dragged out as if you were dead; and then get up and go home, like an actor?

THE EDITOR.

See here: you want to know too much. There will be no pretending about the new lion: let that be enough for you. He's hungry.

SPINTHO.

(groaning with horror) Oh, Lord! Can't you stop talking about it? Isn't it bad enough for us without that?

ANDROCLES.

I'm glad he's hungry. Not that I want him to suffer, poor chap! but then he'll enjoy eating me so much more. There's a cheerful side to everything.

THE EDITOR.

(rising and striding over to Androcles) Here: don't you be obstinate. Come with me and drop the pinch of incense on the altar. That's all you need do to be let off.

ANDROCLES.

No: thank you very much indeed; but I really mustn't.

THE EDITOR.

What! Not to save your life?

ANDROCLES.

I'd rather not. I couldn't sacrifice to Diana: she's a huntress, you know, and kills things.

THE EDITOR.

That don't matter. You can choose your own altar. Sacrifice to Jupiter: he likes animals: he turns himself into an animal when he goes off duty.

ANDROCLES.

No: it's very kind of you; but I feel I can't save myself that way.

THE EDITOR.

But I don't ask you to do it to save yourself: I ask you to do it to oblige me personally.

ANDROCLES.

(scrambling up in the greatest agitation) Oh, please don't say that. That is dreadful. You mean so kindly by me that it seems quite horrible to disoblige you. If you could arrange for me to sacrifice when there's nobody looking, I

shouldn't mind. But I must go into the arena with the rest. My honor, you know.

THE EDITOR.

Honor! The honor of a tailor?

ANDROCLES.

(apologetically) Well, perhaps honor is too strong an expression. Still, you know, I couldn't allow the tailors to get a bad name through me.

THE EDITOR.

How much will you remember of all that when you smell the beast's breath and see his jaws opening to tear out your throat?

SPINTHO.

(rising with a yell of terror) I can't bear it. Where's the altar? I'll sacrifice.

FERROVIUS.

Dog of an apostate. Iscariot!

SPINTHO.

I'll repent afterwards. I fully mean to die in the arena I'll die a martyr and go to heaven; but not this time, not now, not until my nerves are better. Besides, I'm too young: I want to have just one more good time. *(The gladiators laugh at him)*. Oh, will no one tell me where the altar is? *(He dashes into the passage and vanishes)*.

ANDROCLES.

(to the Editor, pointing after Spintho) Brother: I can't do that, not even to oblige you. Don't ask me.

THE EDITOR.

Well, if you're determined to die, I can't help you. But I wouldn't be put off by a swine like that.

FERROVIUS.

Peace, peace: tempt him not. Get thee behind him, Satan.

THE EDITOR.

(flushing with rage) For two pins I'd take a turn in the arena myself to-day, and pay you out for daring to talk to me like that.

Ferrovius springs forward.

LAVINIA.

(rising quickly and interposing) Brother, brother: you forget.

FERROVIUS.

(curbing himself by a mighty effort) Oh, my temper, my wicked temper! *(To the Editor, as Lavinia sits down again, reassured)*. Forgive me, brother. My heart was full of wrath: I should have been thinking of your dear precious soul.

THE EDITOR.

Yah! *(He turns his back on Ferrovius contemptuously, and goes back to his seat)*.

FERROVIUS.

(continuing) And I forgot it all: I thought of nothing but offering to fight you with one hand tied behind me.

THE EDITOR.

(turning pugnaciously) What!

FERROVIUS.

(on the border line between zeal and ferocity) Oh, don't give way to pride and wrath, brother. I could do it so easily. I could—

They are separated by the Menagerie Keeper, who rushes in from the passage, furious.

THE KEEPER.

Here's a nice business! Who let that Christian out of here down to the dens when we were changing the lion into the cage next the arena?

THE EDITOR.

Nobody let him. He let himself.

THE KEEPER.

Well, the lion's ate him.

Consternation. The Christians rise, greatly agitated. The gladiators sit callously, but are highly amused. All speak or cry out or laugh at once. Tumult.

LAVINIA. Oh, poor wretch! FERROVIUS. The apostate has perished. Praise be to God's justice! ANDROCLES. The poor beast was starving. It

couldn't help itself. THE CHRISTIANS. What! Ate him! How frightful! How terrible! Without a moment to repent! God be merciful to him, a sinner! Oh, I can't bear to think of it! In the midst of his sin! Horrible, horrible! THE EDITOR. Serve the rotter right! THE GLADIATORS. Just walked into it, he did. He's martyred all right enough. Good old lion! Old Jock doesn't like that: look at his face. Devil a better! The Emperor will laugh when he hears of it. I can't help smiling. Ha ha ha!!!!

THE KEEPER.

Now his appetite's taken off, he won't as much as look at another Christian for a week.

ANDROCLES.

Couldn't you have saved him brother?

THE KEEPER.

Saved him! Saved him from a lion that I'd just got mad with hunger! a wild one that came out of the forest not four weeks ago! He bolted him before you could say Balbus.

LAVINIA.

(sitting down again) Poor Spintho! And it won't even count as martyrdom!

THE KEEPER.

Serve him right! What call had he to walk down the throat of one of my lions before he was asked?

ANDROCLES.

Perhaps the lion won't eat me now.

THE KEEPER.

Yes: that's just like a Christian: think only of yourself! What am I to do? What am I to say to the Emperor when he sees one of my lions coming into the arena half asleep?

THE EDITOR.

Say nothing. Give your old lion some bitters and a morsel of fried fish to wake up his appetite. *(Laughter)*.

THE KEEPER.

Yes: it's easy for you to talk; but—

THE EDITOR.

(scrambling to his feet) Sh! Attention there! The Emperor. (The Keeper bolts precipitately into the passage. The gladiators rise smartly and form into line).

The Emperor enters on the Christians' side, conversing with Metellus, and followed by his suite.

THE GLADIATORS.

Hail, Caesar! those about to die salute thee.

CAESAR.

Good morrow, friends.

Metellus shakes hands with the Editor, who accepts his condescension with bluff respect.

LAVINIA.

Blessing, Caesar, and forgiveness!

CAESAR.

(turning in some surprise at the salutation) There is no forgiveness for Christianity.

LAVINIA.

I did not mean that, Caesar. I mean that we forgive you.

METELLUS.

An inconceivable liberty! Do you not know, woman, that the Emperor can do no wrong and therefore cannot be forgiven?

LAVINIA.

I expect the Emperor knows better. Anyhow, we forgive him.

THE CHRISTIANS. Amen!

CAESAR.

Metellus: you see now the disadvantage of too much severity. These people have no hope; therefore they have nothing to restrain them from saying what they like to me. They are almost as impertinent as the gladiators. Which is the Greek sorcerer?

ANDROCLES.

(humbly touching his forelock) Me, your Worship.

CAESAR.

My Worship! Good! A new title. Well, what miracles can you perform?

ANDROCLES.

I can cure warts by rubbing them with my tailor's chalk; and I can live with my wife without beating her.

CAESAR.

Is that all?

ANDROCLES.

You don't know her, Caesar, or you wouldn't say that.

CAESAR.

Ah, well, my friend, we shall no doubt contrive a happy release for you. Which is Ferrovius?

FERROVIUS.

I am he.

CAESAR.

They tell me you can fight.

FERROVIUS.

It is easy to fight. I can die, Caesar.

CAESAR.

That is still easier, is it not?

FERROVIUS.

Not to me, Caesar. Death comes hard to my flesh; and fighting comes very easily to my spirit *(beating his breast and lamenting)* O sinner that I am! *(He throws himself down on the steps, deeply discouraged)*.

CAESAR.

Metellus: I should like to have this man in the Pretorian Guard.

METELLUS.

I should not, Caesar. He looks a spoilsport. There are men in whose

presence it is impossible to have any fun: men who are a sort of walking conscience. He would make us all uncomfortable.

CAESAR.

For that reason, perhaps, it might be well to have him. An Emperor can hardly have too many consciences. (*To Ferrovius*) Listen, Ferrovius. (*Ferrovius shakes his head and will not look up*). You and your friends shall not be outnumbered to-day in the arena. You shall have arms; and there will be no more than one gladiator to each Christian. If you come out of the arena alive, I will consider favorably any request of yours, and give you a place in the Pretorian Guard. Even if the request be that no questions be asked about your faith I shall perhaps not refuse it.

FERROVIUS.

I will not fight. I will die. Better stand with the archangels than with the Pretorian Guard.

CAESAR.

I cannot believe that the archangels—whoever they may be—would not prefer to be recruited from the Pretorian Guard. However, as you please. Come: let us see the show.

As the Court ascends the steps, Secutor and the Retiarius return from the arena through the passage; Secutor covered with dust and very angry: Retiarius grinning.

SECUTOR.

Ha, the Emperor. Now we shall see. Caesar: I ask you whether it is fair for the Retiarius, instead of making a fair throw of his net at me, to swish it along the ground and throw the dust in my eyes, and then catch me when I'm blinded. If the vestals had not turned up their thumbs I should have been a dead man.

CAESAR.

(*halting on the stair*) There is nothing in the rules against it.

SECUTOR.

(*indignantly*) Caesar: is it a dirty trick or is it not?

CAESAR.

It is a dusty one, my friend. (*Obsequious laughter*). Be on your guard next

time.

SECUTOR.

Let HIM be on his guard. Next time I'll throw my sword at his heels and strangle him with his own net before he can hop off. (*To Retiarius*) You see if I don't. (*He goes out past the gladiators, sulky and furious*).

CAESAR.

(*to the chuckling Retiarius*). These tricks are not wise, my friend. The audience likes to see a dead man in all his beauty and splendor. If you smudge his face and spoil his armor they will show their displeasure by not letting you kill him. And when your turn comes, they will remember it against you and turn their thumbs down.

THE RETIARIUS.

Perhaps that is why I did it, Caesar. He bet me ten sesterces that he would vanquish me. If I had had to kill him I should not have had the money.

CAESAR.

(*indulgent, laughing*) You rogues: there is no end to your tricks. I'll dismiss you all and have elephants to fight. They fight fairly. (*He goes up to his box, and knocks at it. It is opened from within by the Captain, who stands as on parade to let him pass*). The Call Boy comes from the passage, followed by three attendants carrying respectively a bundle of swords, some helmets, and some breastplates and pieces of armor which they throw down in a heap.

THE CALL BOY.

By your leave, Caesar. Number eleven! Gladiators and Christians!

Ferrovius springs up, ready for martyrdom. The other Christians take the summons as best they can, some joyful and brave, some patient and dignified, some tearful and helpless, some embracing one another with emotion. The Call Boy goes back into the passage.

CAESAR.

(*turning at the door of the box*) The hour has come, Ferrovius. I shall go into my box and see you killed, since you scorn the Pretorian Guard. (*He goes into the box. The Captain shuts the door, remaining inside with the*

Emperor. Metellus and the rest of the suite disperse to their seats. The Christians, led by Ferrovius, move towards the passage).

LAVINIA.

(to Ferrovius) Farewell.

THE EDITOR.

Steady there. You Christians have got to fight. Here! arm yourselves.

FERROVIUS.

(picking up a sword) I'll die sword in hand to show people that I could fight if it were my Master's will, and that I could kill the man who kills me if I chose.

THE EDITOR.

Put on that armor.

FERROVIUS.

No armor.

THE EDITOR.

(bullying him) Do what you're told. Put on that armor.

FERROVIUS.

(gripping the sword and looking dangerous) I said, No armor.

THE EDITOR.

And what am I to say when I am accused of sending a naked man in to fight my men in armor?

FERROVIUS.

Say your prayers, brother; and have no fear of the princes of this world.

THE EDITOR.

Tsha! You obstinate fool! *(He bites his lips irresolutely, not knowing exactly what to do).*

ANDROCLES.

(to Ferrovius) Farewell, brother, till we meet in the sweet by-and-by.

THE EDITOR.

(to Androcles) You are going too. Take a sword there; and put on any armor you can find to fit you.

ANDROCLES.

No, really: I can't fight: I never could. I can't bring myself to dislike anyone enough. I'm to be thrown to the lions with the lady.

THE EDITOR.

Then get out of the way and hold your noise. (*Androcles steps aside with cheerful docility*). Now then! Are you all ready there?

A trumpet is heard from the arena.

FERROVIUS.

(*starting convulsively*) Heaven give me strength!

THE EDITOR.

Aha! That frightens you, does it?

FERROVIUS.

Man: there is no terror like the terror of that sound to me. When I hear a trumpet or a drum or the clash of steel or the hum of the catapult as the great stone flies, fire runs through my veins: I feel my blood surge up hot behind my eyes: I must charge: I must strike: I must conquer: Caesar himself will not be safe in his imperial seat if once that spirit gets loose in me. Oh, brothers, pray! exhort me! remind me that if I raise my sword my honor falls and my Master is crucified afresh.

ANDROCLES.

Just keep thinking how cruelly you might hurt the poor gladiators.

FERROVIUS.

It does not hurt a man to kill him.

LAVINIA.

Nothing but faith can save you.

FERROVIUS.

Faith! Which faith? There are two faiths. There is our faith. And there is the warrior's faith, the faith in fighting, the faith that sees God in the sword. How if that faith should overwhelm me?

LAVINIA.

You will find your real faith in the hour of trial.

FERROVIUS.

That is what I fear. I know that I am a fighter. How can I feel sure that I am a Christian?

ANDROCLES.

Throw away the sword, brother.

FERROVIUS.

I cannot. It cleaves to my hand. I could as easily throw a woman I loved from my arms. (*Starting*) Who spoke that blasphemy? Not I.

LAVINIA.

I can't help you, friend. I can't tell you not to save your own life. Something wilful in me wants to see you fight your way into heaven.

FERROVIUS.

Ha!

ANDROCLES.

But if you are going to give up our faith, brother, why not do it without hurting anybody? Don't fight them. Burn the incense.

FERROVIUS.

Burn the incense! Never.

LAVINIA.

That is only pride, Ferrovius.

FERROVIUS.

ONLY pride! What is nobler than pride? (*Conscience stricken*) Oh, I'm steeped in sin. I'm proud of my pride.

LAVINIA.

They say we Christians are the proudest devils on earth—that only the weak are meek. Oh, I am worse than you. I ought to send you to death; and I am tempting you.

ANDROCLES.

Brother, brother: let them rage and kill: let us be brave and suffer. You must go as a lamb to the slaughter.

FERROVIUS.

Aye, aye: that is right. Not as a lamb is slain by the butcher; but as a butcher might let himself be slain by a (*looking at the Editor*) by a silly ram whose head he could fetch off in one twist.

Before the Editor can retort, the Call Boy rushes up through the passage; and the Captain comes from the Emperor's box and descends the steps.

THE CALL BOY.

In with you: into the arena. The stage is waiting.

THE CAPTAIN.

The Emperor is waiting. (*To the Editor*) What are you dreaming of, man? Send your men in at once.

THE EDITOR.

Yes, Sir: it's these Christians hanging back.

FERROVIUS.

(*in a voice of thunder*) Liar!

THE EDITOR.

(*not heeding him*) March. (*The gladiators told off to fight with the Christians march down the passage*) Follow up there, you.

THE CHRISTIAN MEN AND WOMEN.

(*as they part*) Be steadfast, brother. Farewell. Hold up the faith, brother. Farewell. Go to glory, dearest. Farewell. Remember: we are praying for you. Farewell. Be strong, brother. Farewell. Don't forget that the divine love and our love surround you. Farewell. Nothing can hurt you: remember that, brother. Farewell. Eternal glory, dearest. Farewell.

THE EDITOR.

(*out of patience*) Shove them in, there.

The remaining gladiators and the Call Boy make a movement towards them.

FERROVIUS.

(*interposing*) Touch them, dogs; and we die here, and cheat the heathen of their spectacle. (*To his fellow Christians*) Brothers: the great moment has

come. That passage is your hill to Calvary. Mount it bravely, but meekly; and remember! not a word of reproach, not a blow nor a struggle. Go. (*They go out through the passage. He turns to Lavinia*) Farewell.

LAVINIA.

You forget: I must follow before you are cold.

FERROVIUS.

It is true. Do not envy me because I pass before you to glory. (*He goes through the passage*).

THE EDITOR.

(*to the Call Boy*) Sickening work, this. Why can't they all be thrown to the lions? It's not a man's job. (*He throws himself moodily into his chair*).

The remaining gladiators go back to their former places indifferently. The Call Boy shrugs his shoulders and squats down at the entrance to the passage, near the Editor.

Lavinia and the Christian women sit down again, wrung with grief, some weeping silently, some praying, some calm and steadfast. Androcles sits down at Lavinia's feet. The Captain stands on the stairs, watching her curiously.

ANDROCLES.

I'm glad I haven't to fight. That would really be an awful martyrdom. I am lucky.

LAVINIA.

(*looking at him with a pang of remorse*). Androcles: burn the incense: you'll be forgiven. Let my death atone for both. I feel as if I were killing you.

ANDROCLES.

Don't think of me, sister. Think of yourself. That will keep your heart up.

The Captain laughs sardonically.

LAVINIA.

(*startled: she had forgotten his presence*) Are you there, handsome Captain? Have you come to see me die?

THE CAPTAIN.

(*coming to her side*) I am on duty with the Emperor, Lavinia.

LAVINIA.

Is it part of your duty to laugh at us?

THE CAPTAIN.

No: that is part of my private pleasure. Your friend here is a humorist. I laughed at his telling you to think of yourself to keep up your heart. I say, think of yourself and burn the incense.

LAVINIA.

He is not a humorist: he was right. You ought to know that, Captain: you have been face to face with death.

THE CAPTAIN.

Not with certain death, Lavinia. Only death in battle, which spares more men than death in bed. What you are facing is certain death. You have nothing left now but your faith in this craze of yours: this Christianity. Are your Christian fairy stories any truer than our stories about Jupiter and Diana, in which, I may tell you, I believe no more than the Emperor does, or any educated man in Rome?

LAVINIA.

Captain: all that seems nothing to me now. I'll not say that death is a terrible thing; but I will say that it is so real a thing that when it comes close, all the imaginary things—all the stories, as you call them—fade into mere dreams beside that inexorable reality. I know now that I am not dying for stories or dreams. Did you hear of the dreadful thing that happened here while we were waiting?

THE CAPTAIN.

I heard that one of your fellows bolted, and ran right into the jaws of the lion. I laughed. I still laugh.

LAVINIA.

Then you don't understand what that meant?

THE CAPTAIN.

It meant that the lion had a cur for his breakfast.

LAVINIA.

It meant more than that, Captain. It meant that a man cannot die for a story and a dream. None of us believed the stories and the dreams more devoutly

than poor Spintho; but he could not face the great reality. What he would have called my faith has been oozing away minute by minute whilst I've been sitting here, with death coming nearer and nearer, with reality becoming realler and realler, with stories and dreams fading away into nothing.

THE CAPTAIN.

Are you then going to die for nothing?

LAVINIA.

Yes: that is the wonderful thing. It is since all the stories and dreams have gone that I have now no doubt at all that I must die for something greater than dreams or stories.

THE CAPTAIN.

But for what?

LAVINIA.

I don't know. If it were for anything small enough to know, it would be too small to die for. I think I'm going to die for God. Nothing else is real enough to die for.

THE CAPTAIN.

What is God?

LAVINIA.

When we know that, Captain, we shall be gods ourselves.

THE CAPTAIN.

Lavinia; come down to earth. Burn the incense and marry me.

LAVINIA.

Handsome Captain: would you marry me if I hauled down the flag in the day of battle and burnt the incense? Sons take after their mothers, you know. Do you want your son to be a coward?

THE CAPTAIN.

(strongly moved). By great Diana, I think I would strangle you if you gave in now.

LAVINIA.

(putting her hand on the head of Androcles) The hand of God is on us three,

Captain.

THE CAPTAIN.

What nonsense it all is! And what a monstrous thing that you should die for such nonsense, and that I should look on helplessly when my whole soul cries out against it! Die then if you must; but at least I can cut the Emperor's throat and then my own when I see your blood.

The Emperor throws open the door of his box angrily, and appears in wrath on the threshold. The Editor, the Call Boy, and the gladiators spring to their feet.

THE EMPEROR.

The Christians will not fight; and your curs cannot get their blood up to attack them. It's all that fellow with the blazing eyes. Send for the whip. (*The Call Boy rushes out on the east side for the whip*). If that will not move them, bring the hot irons. The man is like a mountain. (*He returns angrily into the box and slams the door*).

The Call Boy returns with a man in a hideous Etruscan mask, carrying a whip. They both rush down the passage into the arena.

LAVINIA.

(*rising*) Oh, that is unworthy. Can they not kill him without dishonoring him?

ANDROCLES.

(*scrambling to his feet and running into the middle of the space between the staircases*) It's dreadful. Now I want to fight. I can't bear the sight of a whip. The only time I ever hit a man was when he lashed an old horse with a whip. It was terrible: I danced on his face when he was on the ground. He mustn't strike Ferrovius: I'll go into the arena and kill him first. (*He makes a wild dash into the passage. As he does so a great clamor is heard from the arena, ending in wild applause. The gladiators listen and look inquiringly at one another*).

THE EDITOR.

What's up now?

LAVINIA.

(to the Captain) What has happened, do you think?

THE CAPTAIN.

What CAN happen? They are killing them, I suppose.

ANDROCLES.

(running in through the passage, screaming with horror and hiding his eyes)!!!

LAVINIA.

Androcles, Androcles: what's the matter?

ANDROCLES.

Oh, don't ask me, don't ask me. Something too dreadful. Oh! *(He crouches by her and hides his face in her robe, sobbing).*

THE CALL BOY. *(rushing through from the passage as before)* Ropes and hooks there! Ropes and hooks.

THE EDITOR.

Well, need you excite yourself about it? *(Another burst of applause).*

Two slaves in Etruscan masks, with ropes and drag hooks, hurry in.

ONE OF THE SLAVES. How many dead?

THE CALL BOY.

Six. *(The slave blows a whistle twice; and four more masked slaves rush through into the arena with the same apparatus)* And the basket. Bring the baskets. *(The slave whistles three times, and runs through the passage with his companion).*

THE CAPTAIN.

Who are the baskets for?

THE CALL BOY.

For the whip. He's in pieces. They're all in pieces, more or less. *(Lavinia hides her face).*

(Two more masked slaves come in with a basket and follow the others into the arena, as the Call Boy turns to the

gladiators and exclaims, exhausted)

Boys, he's killed the lot.

THE EMPEROR.

(again bursting from his box, this time in an ecstasy of delight) Where is he? Magnificent! He shall have a laurel crown.

Ferrovius, madly waving his bloodstained sword, rushes through the passage in despair, followed by his co-religionists, and by the menagerie keeper, who goes to the gladiators. The gladiators draw their swords nervously.

FERROVIUS.

Lost! lost forever! I have betrayed my Master. Cut off this right hand: it has offended. Ye have swords, my brethren: strike.

LAVINIA.

No, no. What have you done, Ferrovius?

FERROVIUS.

I know not; but there was blood behind my eyes; and there's blood on my sword. What does that mean?

THE EMPEROR.

(enthusiastically, on the landing outside his box) What does it mean? It means that you are the greatest man in Rome. It means that you shall have a laurel crown of gold. Superb fighter, I could almost yield you my throne. It is a record for my reign: I shall live in history. Once, in Domitian's time, a Gaul slew three men in the arena and gained his freedom. But when before has one naked man slain six armed men of the bravest and best? The persecution shall cease: if Christians can fight like this, I shall have none but Christians to fight for me. *(To the Gladiators)* You are ordered to become Christians, you there: do you hear?

RETIARIUS. It is all one to us, Caesar. Had I been there with my net, the story would have been different.

THE CAPTAIN.

(suddenly seizing Lavinia by the wrist and dragging her up the steps to the Emperor) Caesar this woman is the sister of Ferrovius. If she is thrown to the lions he will fret. He will lose weight; get out of condition.

THE EMPEROR.

The lions? Nonsense! (*To Lavinia*) Madam: I am proud to have the honor of making your acquaintance. Your brother is the glory of Rome.

LAVINIA.

But my friends here. Must they die?

THE EMPEROR.

Die! Certainly not. There has never been the slightest idea of harming them. Ladies and gentlemen: you are all free. Pray go into the front of the house and enjoy the spectacle to which your brother has so splendidly contributed. Captain: oblige me by conducting them to the seats reserved for my personal friends.

THE MENAGERIE KEEPER.

Caesar: I must have one Christian for the lion. The people have been promised it; and they will tear the decorations to bits if they are disappointed.

THE EMPEROR.

True, true: we must have somebody for the new lion.

FERROVIUS.

Throw me to him. Let the apostate perish.

THE EMPEROR.

No, no: you would tear him in pieces, my friend; and we cannot afford to throw away lions as if they were mere slaves. But we must have somebody. This is really extremely awkward.

THE MENAGERIE KEEPER.

Why not that little Greek chap? He's not a Christian: he's a sorcerer.

THE EMPEROR.

The very thing: he will do very well.

THE CALL BOY. (*issuing from the passage*) Number twelve. The Christian for the new lion.

ANDROCLES.

(*rising, and pulling himself sadly together*) Well, it was to be, after all.

LAVINIA.

I'll go in his place, Caesar. Ask the Captain whether they do not like best to see a woman torn to pieces. He told me so yesterday.

THE EMPEROR.

There is something in that: there is certainly something in that—if only I could feel sure that your brother would not fret.

ANDROCLES.

No: I should never have another happy hour. No: on the faith of a Christian and the honor of a tailor, I accept the lot that has fallen on me. If my wife turns up, give her my love and say that my wish was that she should be happy with her next, poor fellow! Caesar: go to your box and see how a tailor can die. Make way for number twelve there. (*He marches out along the passage*).

The vast audience in the amphitheatre now sees the Emperor re-enter his box and take his place as Androcles, desperately frightened, but still marching with piteous devotion, emerges from the other end of the passage, and finds himself at the focus of thousands of eager eyes. The lion's cage, with a heavy portcullis grating, is on his left. The Emperor gives a signal. A gong sounds. Androcles shivers at the sound; then falls on his knees and prays.

The grating rises with a clash. The lion bounds into the arena. He rushes round frisking in his freedom. He sees Androcles. He stops; rises stiffly by straightening his legs; stretches out his nose forward and his tail in a horizontal line behind, like a pointer, and utters an appalling roar. Androcles crouches and hides his face in his hands. The lion gathers himself for a spring, swishing his tail to and fro through the dust in an ecstasy of anticipation. Androcles throws up his hands in supplication to heaven. The lion checks at the sight of Androcles's face. He then steals towards him; smells him; arches his back; purrs like a motor car; finally rubs himself against Androcles, knocking him over. Androcles, supporting himself on his wrist, looks affrightedly at the lion. The lion limps on three paws, holding up the other as if it was wounded. A flash of

recognition lights up the face of Androcles. He flaps his hand as if it had a thorn in it, and pretends to pull the thorn out and to hurt himself. The lion nods repeatedly. Androcles holds out his hands to the lion, who gives him both paws, which he shakes with enthusiasm. They embrace rapturously, finally waltz round the arena amid a sudden burst of deafening applause, and out through the passage, the Emperor watching them in breathless astonishment until they disappear, when he rushes from his box and descends the steps in frantic excitement.

THE EMPEROR.

My friends, an incredible! an amazing thing! has happened. I can no longer doubt the truth of Christianity. (*The Christians press to him joyfully*) This Christian sorcerer—(*with a yell, he breaks off as he sees Androcles and the lion emerge from the passage, waltzing. He bolts wildly up the steps into his box, and slams the door. All, Christians and gladiators' alike, fly for their lives, the gladiators bolting into the arena, the others in all directions. The place is emptied with magical suddenness*).

ANDROCLES.

(*naively*) Now I wonder why they all run away from us like that. (*The lion combining a series of yawns, purrs, and roars, achieves something very like a laugh*).

THE EMPEROR.

(*standing on a chair inside his box and looking over the wall*) Sorcerer: I command you to put that lion to death instantly. It is guilty of high treason. Your conduct is most disgra— (*the lion charges at him up the stairs*) help! (*He disappears. The lion rears against the box; looks over the partition at him, and roars. The Emperor darts out through the door and down to Androcles, pursued by the lion.*)

ANDROCLES.

Don't run away, sir: he can't help springing if you run. (*He seizes the Emperor and gets between him and the lion, who stops at once*). Don't be afraid of him.

THE EMPEROR.

I am NOT afraid of him. (*The lion crouches, growling. The Emperor clutches Androcles*) Keep between us.

ANDROCLES.

Never be afraid of animals, your Worship: that's the great secret. He'll be as gentle as a lamb when he knows that you are his friend. Stand quite still; and smile; and let him smell you all over just to reassure him; for, you see, he's afraid of you; and he must examine you thoroughly before he gives you his confidence. (*To the lion*) Come now, Tommy; and speak nicely to the Emperor, the great, good Emperor who has power to have all our heads cut off if we don't behave very, VERY respectfully to him.

The lion utters a fearful roar. The Emperor dashes madly up the steps, across the landing, and down again on the other side, with the lion in hot pursuit. Androcles rushes after the lion; overtakes him as he is descending; and throws himself on his back, trying to use his toes as a brake. Before he can stop him the lion gets hold of the trailing end of the Emperor's robe.

ANDROCLES.

Oh bad wicked Tommy, to chase the Emperor like that! Let go the Emperor's robe at once, sir: where's your manners? (*The lion growls and worries the robe*). Don't pull it away from him, your worship. He's only playing. Now I shall be really angry with you, Tommy, if you don't let go. (*The lion growls again*) I'll tell you what it is, sir: he thinks you and I are not friends.

THE EMPEROR.

(*trying to undo the clasp of his brooch*) Friends! You infernal scoundrel (*the lion growls*) don't let him go. Curse this brooch! I can't get it loose.

ANDROCLES.

We mustn't let him lash himself into a rage. You must show him that you are my particular friend—if you will have the condescension. (*He seizes the Emperor's hands, and shakes them cordially*), Look, Tommy: the nice Emperor is the dearest friend Andy Wandy has in the whole world: he loves him like a brother.

THE EMPEROR.

You little brute, you damned filthy little dog of a Greek tailor: I'll have you burnt alive for daring to touch the divine person of the Emperor. (*The lion roars*).

ANDROCLES.

Oh don't talk like that, sir. He understands every word you say: all animals do: they take it from the tone of your voice. (*The lion growls and lashes his tail*). I think he's going to spring at your worship. If you wouldn't mind saying something affectionate. (*The lion roars*).

THE EMPEROR.

(*shaking Androcles' hands frantically*) My dearest Mr. Androcles, my sweetest friend, my long lost brother, come to my arms. (*He embraces Androcles*). Oh, what an abominable smell of garlic!

The lion lets go the robe and rolls over on his back, clasping his forepaws over one another coquettishly above his nose.

ANDROCLES.

There! You see, your worship, a child might play with him now. See! (*He tickles the lion's belly. The lion wriggles ecstatically*). Come and pet him.

THE EMPEROR.

I must conquer these unkingly terrors. Mind you don't go away from him, though. (*He pats the lion's chest*).

ANDROCLES.

Oh, sir, how few men would have the courage to do that—

THE EMPEROR.

Yes: it takes a bit of nerve. Let us invite the Court in and frighten them. Is he safe, do you think?

ANDROCLES.

Quite safe now, sir.

THE EMPEROR.

(*majestically*) What ho, there! All who are within hearing, return without fear. Caesar has tamed the lion. (*All the fugitives steal cautiously in. The menagerie keeper comes from the passage with other keepers armed with*

iron bars and tridents). Take those things away. I have subdued the beast.
(*He places his foot on it*).

FERROVIUS.

(*timidly approaching the Emperor and looking down with awe on the lion*)

It is strange that I, who fear no man, should fear a lion.

THE CAPTAIN.

Every man fears something, Ferrovius.

THE EMPEROR.

How about the Pretorian Guard now?

FERROVIUS.

In my youth I worshipped Mars, the God of War. I turned from him to serve the Christian god; but today the Christian god forsook me; and Mars overcame me and took back his own. The Christian god is not yet. He will come when Mars and I are dust; but meanwhile I must serve the gods that are, not the God that will be. Until then I accept service in the Guard, Caesar.

THE EMPEROR.

Very wisely said. All really sensible men agree that the prudent course is to be neither bigoted in our attachment to the old nor rash and unpractical in keeping an open mind for the new, but to make the best of both dispensations.

THE CAPTAIN.

What do you say, Lavinia? Will you too be prudent?

LAVINIA.

(*on the stair*) No: I'll strive for the coming of the God who is not yet.

THE CAPTAIN.

May I come and argue with you occasionally?

LAVINIA.

Yes, handsome Captain: you may. (*He kisses her hands*).

THE EMPEROR.

And now, my friends, though I do not, as you see, fear this lion, yet the

strain of his presence is considerable; for none of us can feel quite sure what he will do next.

THE MENAGERIE KEEPER.

Caesar: give us this Greek sorcerer to be a slave in the menagerie. He has a way with the beasts.

ANDROCLES.

(distressed). Not if they are in cages. They should not be kept in cages. They must all be let out.

THE EMPEROR.

I give this sorcerer to be a slave to the first man who lays hands on him. *(The menagerie keepers and the gladiators rush for Androcles. The lion starts up and faces them. They surge back)*. You see how magnanimous we Romans are, Androcles. We suffer you to go in peace.

ANDROCLES.

I thank your worship. I thank you all, ladies and gentlemen. Come, Tommy. Whilst we stand together, no cage for you: no slavery for me. *(He goes out with the lion, everybody crowding away to give him as wide a berth as possible)*.

In this play I have represented one of the Roman persecutions of the early Christians, not as the conflict of a false theology with a true, but as what all such persecutions essentially are: an attempt to suppress a propaganda that seemed to threaten the interests involved in the established law and order, organized and maintained in the name of religion and justice by politicians who are pure opportunist Have-and-Holders. People who are shown by their inner light the possibility of a better world based on the demand of the spirit for a nobler and more abundant life, not for themselves at the expense of others, but for everybody, are naturally dreaded and therefore hated by the Have-and-Holders, who keep always in reserve two sure weapons against them. The first is a persecution effected by the provocation, organization, and arming of that herd instinct which makes men abhor all departures from custom, and, by the most cruel punishments and the wildest calumnies,

force eccentric people to behave and profess exactly as other people do. The second is by leading the herd to war, which immediately and infallibly makes them forget everything, even their most cherished and hardwon public liberties and private interests, in the irresistible surge of their pugnacity and the tense pre-occupation of their terror.

There is no reason to believe that there was anything more in the Roman persecutions than this. The attitude of the Roman Emperor and the officers of his staff towards the opinions at issue were much the same as those of a modern British Home Secretary towards members of the lower middle classes when some pious policeman charges them with Bad Taste, technically called blasphemy: Bad Taste being a violation of Good Taste, which in such matters practically means Hypocrisy. The Home Secretary and the judges who try the case are usually far more sceptical and blasphemous than the poor men whom they persecute; and their professions of horror at the blunt utterance of their own opinions are revolting to those behind the scenes who have any genuine religious sensibility; but the thing is done because the governing classes, provided only the law against blasphemy is not applied to themselves, strongly approve of such persecution because it enables them to represent their own privileges as part of the religion of the country.

Therefore my martyrs are the martyrs of all time, and my persecutors the persecutors of all time. My Emperor, who has no sense of the value of common people's lives, and amuses himself with killing as carelessly as with sparing, is the sort of monster you can make of any silly-clever gentleman by idolizing him. We are still so easily imposed on by such idols that one of the leading pastors of the Free Churches in London denounced my play on the ground that my persecuting Emperor is a very fine fellow, and the persecuted Christians ridiculous. From which I conclude that a popular pulpit may be as perilous to a man's soul as an imperial throne.

All my articulate Christians, the reader will notice, have different enthusiasms, which they accept as the same religion only because it involves them in a common opposition to the official religion and consequently in a common doom. Androcles is a humanitarian naturalist, whose views surprise everybody. Lavinia, a clever and fearless freethinker, shocks the Pauline Ferrovius, who is comparatively stupid and conscience ridden. Spintho, the blackguardly debauchee, is presented as one of the

typical Christians of that period on the authority of St. Augustine, who seems to have come to the conclusion at one period of his development that most Christians were what we call wrong uns. No doubt he was to some extent right: I have had occasion often to point out that revolutionary movements attract those who are not good enough for established institutions as well as those who are too good for them.

But the most striking aspect of the play at this moment is the terrible topicality given it by the war. We were at peace when I pointed out, by the mouth of Ferrovius, the path of an honest man who finds out, when the trumpet sounds, that he cannot follow Jesus. Many years earlier, in *The Devil's Disciple*, I touched the same theme even more definitely, and showed the minister throwing off his black coat for ever when he discovered, amid the thunder of the captains and the shouting, that he was a born fighter. Great numbers of our clergy have found themselves of late in the position of Ferrovius and Anthony Anderson. They have discovered that they hate not only their enemies but everyone who does not share their hatred, and that they want to fight and to force other people to fight. They have turned their churches into recruiting stations and their vestries into munition workshops. But it has never occurred to them to take off their black coats and say quite simply, "I find in the hour of trial that the Sermon on the Mount is tosh, and that I am not a Christian. I apologize for all the unpatriotic nonsense I have been preaching all these years. Have the goodness to give me a revolver and a commission in a regiment which has for its chaplain a priest of the god Mars: my God." Not a bit of it. They have stuck to their livings and served Mars in the name of Christ, to the scandal of all religious mankind. When the Archbishop of York behaved like a gentleman and the Head Master of Eton preached a Christian sermon, and were reviled by the rabble, the Martian parsons encouraged the rabble. For this they made no apologies or excuses, good or bad. They simply indulged their passions, just as they had always indulged their class prejudices and commercial interests, without troubling themselves for a moment as to whether they were Christians or not. They did not protest even when a body calling itself the Anti-German League (*not having noticed, apparently, that it had been anticipated by the British Empire, the French Republic, and the Kingdoms of Italy, Japan, and Serbia*) actually succeeded in closing a church at Forest Hill in which God was worshipped in the German language. One would have supposed that this grotesque

outrage on the commonest decencies of religion would have provoked a remonstrance from even the worldliest bench of bishops. But no: apparently it seemed to the bishops as natural that the House of God should be looted when He allowed German to be spoken in it as that a baker's shop with a German name over the door should be pillaged. Their verdict was, in effect, "Serve God right, for creating the Germans!" The incident would have been impossible in a country where the Church was as powerful as the Church of England, had it had at the same time a spark of catholic as distinguished from tribal religion in it. As it is, the thing occurred; and as far as I have observed, the only people who gasped were the Freethinkers. Thus we see that even among men who make a profession of religion the great majority are as Martian as the majority of their congregations. The average clergyman is an official who makes his living by christening babies, marrying adults, conducting a ritual, and making the best he can (*when he has any conscience about it*) of a certain routine of school superintendence, district visiting, and organization of almsgiving, which does not necessarily touch Christianity at any point except the point of the tongue. The exceptional or religious clergyman may be an ardent Pauline salvationist, in which case his more cultivated parishioners dislike him, and say that he ought to have joined the Methodists. Or he may be an artist expressing religious emotion without intellectual definition by means of poetry, music, vestments and architecture, also producing religious ecstasy by physical expedients, such as fasts and vigils, in which case he is denounced as a Ritualist. Or he may be either a Unitarian Deist like Voltaire or Tom Paine, or the more modern sort of Anglican Theosophist to whom the Holy Ghost is the Elan Vital of Bergson, and the Father and Son are an expression of the fact that our functions and aspects are manifold, and that we are all sons and all either potential or actual parents, in which case he is strongly suspected by the straiter Salvationists of being little better than an Atheist. All these varieties, you see, excite remark. They may be very popular with their congregations; but they are regarded by the average man as the freaks of the Church. The Church, like the society of which it is an organ, is balanced and steadied by the great central Philistine mass above whom theology looms as a highly spoken of and doubtless most important thing, like Greek Tragedy, or classical music, or the higher mathematics, but who are very glad when church is over and they can go home to lunch or dinner, having in fact, for all practical purposes, no reasoned convictions at all, and being

equally ready to persecute a poor Freethinker for saying that St. James was not infallible, and to send one of the Peculiar People to prison for being so very peculiar as to take St. James seriously.

In short, a Christian martyr was thrown to the lions not because he was a Christian, but because he was a crank: that is, an unusual sort of person. And multitudes of people, quite as civilized and amiable as we, crowded to see the lions eat him just as they now crowd the lion-house in the Zoo at feeding-time, not because they really cared two-pence about Diana or Christ, or could have given you any intelligent or correct account of the things Diana and Christ stood against one another for, but simply because they wanted to see a curious and exciting spectacle. You, dear reader, have probably run to see a fire; and if somebody came in now and told you that a lion was chasing a man down the street you would rush to the window. And if anyone were to say that you were as cruel as the people who let the lion loose on the man, you would be justly indignant. Now that we may no longer see a man hanged, we assemble outside the jail to see the black flag run up. That is our duller method of enjoying ourselves in the old Roman spirit. And if the Government decided to throw persons of unpopular or eccentric views to the lions in the Albert Hall or the Earl's Court stadium tomorrow, can you doubt that all the seats would be crammed, mostly by people who could not give you the most superficial account of the views in question. Much less unlikely things have happened. It is true that if such a revival does take place soon, the martyrs will not be members of heretical religious sects: they will be Peculiars, Anti-Vivisectionists, Flat-Earth men, scoffers at the laboratories, or infidels who refuse to kneel down when a procession of doctors goes by. But the lions will hurt them just as much, and the spectators will enjoy themselves just as much, as the Roman lions and spectators used to do.

It was currently reported in the Berlin newspapers that when *Androcles* was first performed in Berlin, the Crown Prince rose and left the house, unable to endure the (*I hope*) very clear and fair exposition of autocratic Imperialism given by the Roman captain to his Christian prisoners. No English Imperialist was intelligent and earnest enough to do the same in London. If the report is correct, I confirm the logic of the Crown Prince, and am glad to find myself so well understood. But I can assure him that the Empire which served for my model when I wrote *Androcles* was, as he is now finding to his cost, much nearer my home than the German one.

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