

# The Temple of Death

By A. C. Benson

It was late in the afternoon of a dark and rainy day when Paullinus left the little village where he had found shelter for the night. The village lay in a great forest country in the heart of Gaul. The scattered folk that inhabited it were mostly heathens, and very strange and secret rites were still celebrated in lonely sanctuaries. Christian teachers, of whom Paullinus was one, travelled alone or in little companies along the great high roads, turning aside to visit the woodland hamlets, and labouring patiently to make the good news of the Word known.

They were mostly unmolested, for they travelled under the powerful name of Romans, and in many places they were kindly received. Paullinus had been for months slowly faring from village to village, without any fixed plan of journeying, but asking his way from place to place, as the Spirit led him. He was a young man, a very faithful Christian, and with a love of adventure and travel which stood him in good stead. He carried a little money, but he had seldom need to use it, for the people were simple and hospitable; he did not try to hold assemblies, for he believed that the Gospel must spread like leaven from quiet heart to quiet heart. Indeed he did not purpose to proclaim the Word, but rather to prepare the way for those that should come after. He was of a strong habit, spare and upright; when he was alone he walked swiftly, looking very eagerly about him. He loved the aspect of the earth, the green branching trees, the wild creatures of the woodland, the voices of birds and the sound of streams. And he had too a great and simple love for his own kind, and though he had little eloquence he had a plentiful command of friendly and shrewd talk, and even better than he loved to speak he loved to listen. He had a sweet and open smile, that drew the hearts of all whom he met to him, especially of the children. And he loved his wandering life in the free air, without the daily cares of settled habit.

He had spent the night with an old and calm man, who had been a warrior in his youth, but who could now do little but attend to his farm. Paullinus had spoken to him of the love of the Father and the tender care that Jesus had to His brothers on earth; the old man had listened courteously, and had said that it sounded fair enough, but that he was too old to change, and must stand in the ancient ways. Paullinus did not press him; his custom was never to do that. In the morning he had gone to and fro in the village, and it was late before he thought of setting out; the old man had pressed him to stay another night, but something in Paullinus' heart had told him that he must not wait, for it seemed to him that there was work to be done. The old man came with him to the edge of the forest, and gave him very particular directions to the village he was bound for, which lay in the heart of the wood. "Of one thing I must advise you," he said. "There is, in the wood, some way off the track, a place to which I would not have you go—it is a temple of one of our gods, a dark place. Be certain, dear sir, to pass it by. No one would go there willingly, save that we are sometimes compelled." He broke off suddenly here and looked about him fearfully; then he went on in a low voice: "It is called the Temple of the Grey Death, and there are rites done there of which I may not speak. I would it were otherwise, but the gods are strong—and the priest is a hard and evil man, who won his office in a terrible way, and shall lose it no less terribly. Oh, go not there, dear stranger;" and he laid his hand upon his arm.

"Dear brother," said Paullinus, "I have no mind to go there—but your words seem to have a dark meaning behind them. What are these rites of which you speak?" But the old man shook his head.

“I may not speak of them,” he said, “it is better to be silent.”

Then they took a kind leave of each other, and Paullinus said that he would pass again that way to see his friend, “for we are friends, I know.” And so he went into the wood. It was a wood of very ancient trees, and the dark leaves roofed over the grassy track making a tunnel. The heavens too grew dark above, and Paullinus heard the drops patter upon the leaves. Generally he loved well enough to walk in the woodways, but here it seemed different. He would have liked a companion. Something sinister and terrible seemed to him to hide within those gloomy avenues, and the feeling grew stronger every moment. But he said to himself some of the simple hymns with which he often cheered his way, and felt again that he was in the hands of God.

Presently he passed a little forest pool that was one of the marks of his way. Upon the further bank he was surprised to see a man sitting, with a rod or spear in his hand, looking upon the water. He was glad to see another man in this solitude, and hailed him cheerfully, asking if he was in the right way. The man looked up at the sound. Paullinus saw that he was of middle age, very strong and muscular—but undoubtedly he had an evil face. He scowled, as though he were vexed to be interrupted, and with an odd and angry gesture of the hand he stepped quickly within the wood and disappeared. Paullinus felt in his mind that the man wished him evil, and went on his way somewhat heavily. And now the sun began to go down and it was darker than ever in the forest; Paullinus came to a place where the road forked, and thinking over his note of the way, struck off to the left, but as he did so he felt a certain misgiving which he could not explain. He now began to hurry, for the light failed every moment, and the colour was soon gone out of the grass beneath his feet, leaving all a dark and indistinguishable brown. Soon the path forked again, and then came a road striking across the one that he had pursued of which he did not think he had been told. He went straight forward, but it was now grown so dark that he could no longer see his way, and stumbled very sadly along the wet path, feeling with his hand for the trees. He thought that he must by this time have gone much further than the distance between the villages, and it was clear to him that he had somehow missed the road.

He at last determined that he would try to return, and went slowly back the way that he had come, till at last the night came down upon him. Then Paullinus was struck with a great fear. There were wolves in those forests he knew, though they lived in the unvisited depths of the wood and came not near the habitations of men unless they were fierce with famine. But he had heard several times a strange snarling cry some way off in the wood, and once or twice he had thought he was being softly followed. So he determined to go no further, but to climb up into a tree, if he could find one, and there to spend an uneasy night.

He felt about for some time, but could discover nothing but small saplings, when he suddenly saw through the trees a light shine, and it came across him that he had stumbled as it were by accident upon the village. So he went forward slowly towards the light—there was no track here—often catching his feet among brambles and low plants, till the gloom lifted somewhat and he felt a freer air, and saw that he was in a clearing in the wood. Then he discerned, in front of him, a space of deeper darkness against the sky, what he thought to be the outline of the roofs of buildings; then the light shone out of a window near the ground; but presently he came to a stop, for he saw the light flash and gleam in the ripples of a water that lay in his path and blocked his way.

Then he called aloud once or twice; something seemed to stir in the house, and presently the light in the window was obscured by the head and shoulders of a man, who pressed to the opening; but there was no answer. Then Paullinus spoke very clearly, and said that he was a

Roman, a traveller who had lost his way. Then a harsh voice told him to walk round the water to the left and wait awhile; which Paullinus did.

Soon he heard steps come out of the house and come to the water's edge. Then he heard sounds as though some one were walking on a hollow board—then with a word of warning there fell the end of a plank near him on the bank, and he was bidden to come across. He did so, though the bridge was narrow and he was half afraid of falling; but in a moment he was at the other side, a dark figure beside him. He was bidden to wait again, and the figure went out over the water and seemed to pull in the plank that had served as a bridge; and then the man returned and bade him to come forward. Paullinus followed the figure, and in a moment he could see the dark eaves of a long, low house before him, very rudely but strongly built; then a door was opened showing a lighted room within, and he was bidden to step forward and enter.

He found himself in a large, bare chamber, the walls and ceiling of a dark wood. A pine torch flared and dripped in a socket. There were one or two rough seats and a table spread with a meal. At the end of the room there were some bricks piled for a fireplace with charred ashes and a smouldering log among them, for though it was still summer the nights began to be brisk. On the walls hung some implements; a spade and a hoe, a spear, a sword, some knives and javelins. He that inhabited it seemed to be part a tiller of the soil and part a huntsman; but there were other things of which Paullinus could not guess the use—hooks and pronged forks. There were skins of beasts on the floor, and on the ceiling hung bundles of herbs and dried meats. The air was pungent with pine-smoke. He recognised the man at once as the same that he had seen beside the pool; and he looked to Paullinus even stranger and more dangerous than he had seemed before. He seemed too to be on his guard against some terror, and held in his hand a club, as though he were ready to use it.

Presently he said a few words in a harsh voice:

“You are a Roman,” he asked; “how may I know it?” “I do not know,” said Paullinus, trying to smile, “unless you will believe my word.” “What is your business here?” said the man; “are you a merchant?” “No,” said Paullinus, “I have no business, I travel, and I talk with those I meet—perhaps I am a teacher—a Christian teacher.” At this the man's sternness seemed a little to relax. “Oh, the new faith?” he said, rather contemptuously; “well, I have heard of it—and it will never spread; but I am curious to know what it really is, and you shall tell me of it.” But suddenly his angry terrors came upon him again, and he said, with a frown, “But where were you bound, and whence come you?”

Paullinus, with such calmness as he could muster, for he felt himself to be in some danger, he scarcely knew what, mentioned the names of the villages. “Well, you have missed your way,” said the man. “Why did you come here to the Temple of Death?” Paullinus had a sudden access of dread at the words. “Is this the Temple?” he said; “it is the place I was bidden to avoid.” At this the man gave a fearful kind of smile, like a flash of lightning out of a sombre cloud, and he said, with a certain dark pride, “Ay, there are few that come willingly; but now you must abide with me tonight—unless,” he added, with a savage look, “you have a mind to be eaten by wolves.” “I will certainly stay,” said Paullinus, “I am not afraid—I serve a very mighty God myself, who guards his servants if they guard themselves.” “Ay, does He?” said the man, with a flash of anger, “then He must needs be strong;—but I wish you no evil,” he added in a moment. “I think you are a brave man, perhaps a good one— I fear you not.” “There is no need for you to fear me,” said Paullinus, “my God is a God of peace and love—and indeed,” he added with a smile, looking at the man's great frame, “I should have thought there was little need for you to fear any one.” This last word seemed to dissolve the man's evil mood all at once, for he put away

the club he held, in a corner of the room, and bade Paullinus eat and drink, which he did gladly. The meat was a strongly flavoured kind of venison, and there was a rough bread, and a drink that seemed both sweet and strong, and had the taste of summer flowers. He praised the food, and the man said to him, "Ay, I have learnt to suit it to my taste. I live here in much loneliness, and there is none to help me."

After the meal the man asked him to tell him something of the new faith, and Paullinus very willingly told him as simply as he could of the Way of Christ.

The man listened with a sort of gloomy attention. "So it is this," he said at last, "which is taking hold of the world! well, it is pretty enough—a good faith for such as live in ease and security, for women and children in fair houses; but it suits not with these forests. The god who made these great lonely woods, and who dwells in them, is very different,"—he rose and made a strange obeisance as he talked. "He loves death and darkness, and the cries of strong and furious beasts. There is little peace here, for all that the woods are still— and as for love, it is of a brutish sort. Nay, stranger, the gods of these lands are very different; and they demand very different sacrifices. They delight in sharp woes and agonies, in grinding pains, in dripping blood and death-sweats and cries of despair. If these woods were all cut down, and the land ploughed up, and peaceful folk lived here in quiet fields and farms, then perhaps your simple, easy-going God might come and dwell with them—but now, if he came, he would flee in terror."

"Nay," said Paullinus, but somewhat sadly, for the man's words seemed to have a fearful truth about them, "the Father waits long and is kind; the victory of love is slow, but it is sure."

"It is slow enough!" said the man; "these forests have grown here beyond the memory of man, and they will stand long after you and I have been turned to a handful of dust—and so I will serve my gods while I live. But you are weary," he added, "and may sleep; fear not any hurt from me; and as for the way you speak of, well, I will say that I should be content if it had the victory. I am sick at heart of the hard rule of these gods—but I fear them, and will serve them faithfully till I die."

And then he brought some skins of beasts and heaped them in a corner of the room for Paullinus, who lay down gladly, and from mere weariness fell asleep. But the priest sat long before the fire in thought; and twice he went to the door and looked out, as if he were waiting for some tidings.

Once the opening of the door aroused Paullinus; and he saw the dark figure of the priest stand in the doorway, and over his head and shoulders a dark still night, pierced with golden stars ~ and once again, when he opened the door a second time, the pure gush of air into the close room woke Paullinus from a deep sleep; again he saw the priest stand silent in the door, with his hands clasped behind him; and through the door Paullinus could see the dim ring of dewy woods, that seemed to sleep in quiet dreams; and over the woods a great pale light of dawn that was coming slowly up out of the east.

But Paullinus fell back into sleep again from utter weariness, as a man might dive into a pool. And when at last he opened his eyes, he saw that day was come with an infinite sweetness and freshness; the birds called faintly in the thickets; and the priest was going slowly about his daily task, preparing food; and Paullinus, from where he lay, smiled at him, and the priest smiled back, as though half ashamed, and presently said, "You have slept deeply, sir; and to sleep as you have done shows that a man is brave and innocent."

Then Paullinus rose, and would have helped him, but the man said, "Nay, you are my guest; and besides, I do things in a certain order, as all do who live alone, and I would not have any one to meddle with me." He spoke gruffly, but there was a certain courtesy in his manner.

Presently the priest asked him to come and eat, and they sat together eating in a friendly way. The priest was silent, but Paullinus talked of many things—and at last the priest said, “I thought I loved my loneliness, but it seems that I am pleased to have a companion. I believe,” he added, “that I would be content if you would dwell with me.” And Paullinus smiled in answer, and said, “Ay, it is not good to live alone.”

A little while after Paullinus said that he must set out on his way, and that he was very grateful for so gentle a welcome; but the priest said, “Nay, but you must see the sights of my house and of the temple. Few folk have seen it, and never a foreign man. It is not a merry place,” he added, “but it will do to make a traveller’s tale.”

So he led him to the door, and they went out. Paullinus saw that the house where he had spent the night stood on a little square island, with a deep moat all round it, filled with water; the island was all overgrown with bushes and tall plants, except that in one place there were some pens where sheep and goats were kept; and a path led down to the landing-place where he had crossed it the night before. But what at once seized and held the eyes and mind of Paullinus was the temple. He thought he had never seen so grim a place; it rose above the bushes and above the house. It was of very rough stone, all blank of windows, with a roof of stone; the blocks were very large, and Paullinus wondered how they had been brought there. In front there was a low door, and over it a hideous carving, that seemed to Paullinus to be the work of devils. Apart from the temple, rising among the bushes, stood a rude sculptured figure, with a leering evil face, very roughly but vigorously cut, with an arm raised as though beckoning people to the temple. This figure, of a kind of reddish stone, seemed horrible beyond words to Paullinus. It seemed to him like a servant of Satan, if not Satan himself, frozen into stone.

The priest looked at Paullinus, who could not help showing his horror, with a kind of pride. Then he said, “Will you go further? Will you enter the temple with me, and see what is therein? Perhaps you will after all bow your head to the gods of the forest.” And Paullinus said, “Yes, I will go,” and he said a silent prayer to the Lord Christ that He would guard him well. Another path paved with stone led from the landing-place to the temple, along which they went slowly; the priest leading. Arrived at the door, the priest made another strange obeisance, lifting his hands slowly above his head and closing his eyes; then he opened the door into the temple itself. There came out a foul and heavy smell that shuddered in the nostrils of Paullinus and left him gasping somewhat for breath. The priest looked at him with a sort of curious wonder, which made Paullinus determine to go further.

The temple itself was large and dark, a sickly light only filtering in through a hole in the roof. The floor was paved, and the roof was supported by great wooden columns, the trunks of large forest trees. The greater part of the building was shut off by a large wooden screen, about the height of a man, close to them, so that they stood in a kind of vestibule. The whole of the building, walls, roof, and floor, had been painted at some time or other a black colour, which was now faded and looked a dark slaty grey. Over the screen in the centre was seen the head of what seemed an image, very great and horrible. The light, which came from an opening immediately above the image, showed a horned and bearded head, misshapen and grotesque. Possibly at another time and place Paullinus might have smiled at the ugly thing; but here, peering at them over the screen, in the fetid gloom, it froze the blood in his veins.

And now behind the screen were strange sounds as well, a kind of heavy breathing or snorting, and what seemed the scratching of some beast. The priest went up to the screen and opened a sort of panel in it; this was followed by a hoarse and hideous outcry within, half of fear and half of rage.

The priest took from an angle of the wall a long pole shod with iron, and leaned within the opening, saying in a stern tone some words that Paullinus did not understand. Presently the noises ceased, and the priest, using a great effort, seemed to pull or push at something with the pole, and there was the sound as of a great gate turning on its hinges. Then he drew his head and arms out, and said to Paullinus, "We may enter." He then threw a door open in the middle of the screen and went in. Paullinus followed.

In front of them stood a great statue on a pedestal; the figure of a thing, half-man half-goat, crouched as though to spring. The smell was still more horrible within, and it became clear to Paullinus that he was in the lair of some ravenous and filthy beast. There lay a mess of bones underneath the statue. To the left, in the wall, there was a strong oaken door, made like a portcullis, which seemed to close the entrance of a den; something seemed to move and stir in the blackness, and Paullinus heard the sound of heavy breathing within. The priest, still holding the pole in his hand, led the way round to the back of the statue. Here, set into the wall, were a number of stone slabs, with what seemed to be a name upon each, rudely carved.

The priest pointed to these and said, "Those are the names of the priests of this shrine. And now," he went on, "I will tell you a thing which is in my mind—I know not why I should wish to say it—but it seems to me that I have a great desire to tell you all and keep nothing back; and I tell you this, though you may turn from me with shame and horror. We have a law that if a man be condemned to death for a certain crime—if he have slain one of his kin—he is bound to a tree in the forest to be devoured piecemeal by the wolves. But if there seem to be cause or excuse for the deed that he has done, then he is allowed to purchase his life on one condition—he may come to this place and slay the priest who serves here, if he can, or himself be slain. And if he slay him he reigns in his stead until he himself be slain. And the rites of this place are these: all of this tribe who may be guilty of the slaying of a man by secret or open violence without due cause are offered here a sacrifice to the god—and that is the task that I have done and must do till I am myself slain. And here in a den dwells a savage beast—I know not its name and its age is very great—that slays and devours the guilty. What wonder if a man's heart grows dark and cruel here; I can only look into my own heart, black as it is, and wonder that it is not blacker. But the gods are good to me, and have not cursed me utterly.

"And now I will tell you that when I saw you by the pool, and when you called to me in the night, I thought that perchance you had come to slay me—and then I saw that you were alone, and not guarded as a prisoner would be; but even then my heart was dark, because the god has had no sacrifice for many a month, and seems to call upon me for a victim—so I had it in my heart to slay you here. And now," he said, "I have opened the door of my heart, and you have seen all that is to be seen."

And then he looked upon Paullinus as if to know his judgment; and Paullinus, turning to the priest, and seeing that in his heart he desired what was better, and abode not willingly in the ways of death, said, "Brother, with all my heart I am sorry for you—and I would have you turn your heart away from these dark and evil gods—who are indeed, I think, the very spirits of hell—and turn to the Father of mercy of whom I spoke, with whom there is forgiveness and love for all His sons, when once they turn to Him and ask His help."

The priest looked very gently at Paullinus as he spoke; but there came a horrible roaring out of the den, and the beast flung himself against the bars as if in rage.

Then the priest said, "For twenty years I have heard no speech like this; for twenty years I have lived with death and done wickedness, and all men turn from me with fear and loathing, and speak not any word to me: I have never looked in a kindly human eye, nor felt the hand of a

friend within my own. Judge between me and my sin. I had a brother, an evil man, who made it his pleasure to trouble me. I was stronger than he, and he feared me. I loved a maiden of our tribe, and she loved me; and when my brother knew it he went about to do her a hurt, that it might grieve me. One day she went through the forest alone, and never returned, and I, in madness ranging the wood to find her, found the mangled bones of her body. I knew it by the poor torn hair—she had been devoured by wolves—but burying the bones I saw that the feet were tied together with a cord, and then I knew that some one had bound her by violence and left her to be devoured.

“Then as I returned from burying her, I came upon my brother in a glade of the wood; and he looked upon me with an evil smile, and said, ‘Hast thou found her?’ And I knew in my heart what he had done, and I slew him where he stood—and then I returned and said what I had done. Then they imprisoned me—for my brother was older than myself, and my enemies said that I had done it to win his inheritance—and at last, after long consulting, they gave me the choice to be devoured of wolves or to become the priest of Death. I chose the latter, because I was mad and hated all mankind. I came to this place at sundown, and my guards left me. I swam the ditch, and knocked at the priest’s door; he was an old man and piteous, who abhorred his trade—and there I seized him and slew him with my hands—he was weak and made no resistance—and I flung his body to the beast and carved his name. That is my bitter story—and since then I have lived, accursed and dreaded. These gods are hard taskmasters.” He made a wild gesture of the hand and turned his bright eyes upon Paullinus, who stood aghast.

“The tale is told,” said the priest. “I who have kept silence all these years have babbled my story to a stranger. Why did I tell you? I thought that with all your talk of mercy and forgiveness you might have a message for my bitter and tired heart—but you shrink from me, and are silent.”

“Nay,” said Paullinus, “shrink from you!—not so—nay, I cling to you more than ever; come and claim your part in the forgiveness that waits for all—you have suffered, you have repented—and the God whom I serve has comfort and peace for you and for all; His love is wide and deep—claim your share in it.” And he took the priest’s hand in both of his own.

There was a horrible roaring behind them as they stood: the great beast behind them struck at the bars, but the priest took no heed.

“If I could,” he said, with his eyes fixed on Paullinus’ face.

Nay then,” said Paullinus, “if you would it is done already, for He reads the very secrets of the heart.”

There broke out a loud fierce crashing sound behind them; the great oaken gate heaved and splintered, and a monstrous beast as huge as a horse appeared at the mouth of the den; his small head was laid back on his hairy shoulders, his little eyes gleamed wickedly, and his red mouth opened snarling fiercely. The priest turned, and met the rush of the beast full. In a moment he was flung to the ground with a dreadful rending sound. “Save yourself!” he cried. The huge brute glared, with his foot upon the fallen form, and seemed to hesitate whether to attack his second foe. Paullinus, hardly knowing what he did, seized the great iron-pointed pole, and with a firmness of strength which he had not known himself to possess drove it full into the monster’s great throat as it opened its mouth towards him. It made a wild and sickening cry; it raised one foot as though to strike, then it beat the air and struck once at the head of the prostrate form; then, with a gurgling sound, spitting out a flood of hot blood, it collapsed, rolled slowly on one side. Paullinus, watching it intently and still holding the pole, thrust it further in with all his might. It quivered all over, and in a moment lay still. Paullinus made haste to drag the priest out from beneath—but he saw that all was over; the last blow of the beast had battered in the skull—

and besides that the body was horribly mangled and crushed. The limbs of the priest were heavy and relaxed; his hands were folded together as though in prayer, and he drew one or two little fluttering breaths, but never opened his eyes.

Paullinus was like one in a dream at this sudden horror; but he kept his senses; once or twice the great beast moved, and drummed on the pavement with a horny paw. So Paullinus drew the prostrate body of the priest outside the screen and closed the door. Then he went with swift steps out of the temple and to the water's edge; he drew up a little water in his hand, looking into the dark and cool moat. Then he came back with a purpose in his mind. He sprinkled the water on the poor mangled brow; and then, choosing the name of the Apostle whom Jesus most loved, he said, "John, I baptize thee, *in nomine, &c.*" It was like a prisoner's release; the straining hands relaxed, and with a sigh the new-made Christian presently died. "I doubt I have done right," said Paullinus to himself. "He was coming to the Saviour very swiftly, and I think was at His feet; and if he was not in heart a Christian, the Lord will know when he meets Him in the heavenly places."

When Paullinus went back to the hut he found a rough mattock. First he dug a great hole; the earth was black and soft, and water oozed soon into the depths; then with much painful labour he dragged the great beast thither, and covered him in from the eye of day; and then he toiled to dig a grave for the priest—once he stopped to eat a little food, but he worked with unusual ease and lightness. But the night came down on the forest as he finished the grave—for he did not wish that the priest should lie within the dreadful temple.

Then he went back, very weary but not sad; his terrors and distresses had drawn slowly off from his mind, as he worked in the still afternoon, under the clear sky, all surrounded by woods; the earth seemed like one who had come from a bath, washed through and through by the drench of wholesome rains, and the smell of the woods was sharp and sweet.

Paullinus slept quietly that night, feeling very close to God; but in the morning, when the dawn was coming up, he was awakened by a shouting outside. His sleep had been so deep and still that he hardly knew at first where he was, but it all came swiftly back to him; and then the shouting was repeated. Paullinus rose to his feet and went slowly out.

On the edge of the water, where the causeway crossed it, he saw two men standing, that from their dress seemed to be great chiefs. Behind them, with his hands bound, and attached by a rope held in the hand of one of the chiefs, was a young man of a wild and fierce aspect, in the dress of a serf, a rough tunic and leggings. His head was bare, and he looked around him in dismay, like a beast in a trap. Behind, at the edge of the clearing, stood four soldiers silent, with bows strung and arrows fitted to the string. Over the whole group there seemed to be the shadow of a stern purpose. At the appearance of Paullinus, the two chiefs hurriedly bent together in talk, and looked at him with astonishment. Paullinus came down to the water's edge, when one of the chiefs said, "We have come for the priest; where is he? For he must do his office upon this man, who hath slain one of his kin by stealth."

"It is too late," said Paullinus; "he is dead, and waits for burial."

Then the chiefs seemed again to confer together, and one of them, with a strange reverence, said, "Then you are the new priest of the temple? And yet it seems strange, for you are not of our nation."

"Nay," said Paullinus, "I am a wanderer, a Roman. It was not I who slew him—it was the great beast who lived in the den yonder; and the beast have I slain—but come over and let me tell you all the tale."

So he made haste to put out the bridge, and the two chiefs came over in silence, leaving the prisoner in the hands of the guards who surrounded him. Paullinus led them to the temple, which he could hardly prevail upon them to enter, and showed them the dead body, which was a fearful sight enough; then he showed them the broken gate and the empty den, and then he led them to the mound where the beast lay buried, and offered if they would to uncover the body. "Nay, we would not see him," said the elder chief in a low voice; "it is enough."

Paullinus then led them to the hut and told them the story from beginning to end. The chiefs looked at him with surprise when he told them of the beast's death, and one of them said, "I doubt, sir, you slew him by Roman magic—for he was exceedingly strong, and you look not much of a warrior." "Nay," said Paullinus, smiling, "I doubt he was his own death, as is often the end of evil—he leapt upon the pole: I did but hold it, and the Lord made my hand strong."

When he had done the story the chiefs spoke together a little in a low tone. Then one of them said, "This is a strange tale, sir. And it seems to us that you must be a man whom the gods love, for you stayed here a night with the priest—who was a fierce man and no friend of strangers—and received no hurt. And then you have slain the Hound of Death, unarmed. But we will ask you to go with us, for we cannot decide so grave a matter until we have taken counsel with our tribe. Be assured that you shall be used courteously."

"I will go very willingly," said Paullinus. "My God did indeed send me hither to do a work which He had prepared for me to do, and I would serve His will in all things."

So they first buried the body of the priest in his grave, and then they went together to the village, and messages were sent to the chiefs of the tribe, who came in haste, ten great warriors; and they sat and debated long in low voices. And Paullinus sat without wondering that he could feel so calm, for he knew that he was in jeopardy.

So when they had talked a long while they called Paullinus into the council, and the oldest chief, an ancient warrior with silver hair, much bowed with age, told him that they saw that he was a man favoured of God. "I hide it not from you," he said, "that some of my brethren here would have it that death should be your portion, because you have meddled with sacred and secret things. But I think that it is clear that you have done no wrong, or otherwise you would have been slain; you spoke but now of the God you serve, and we would hear of Him; for now that the priest is dead and the beast dead, we say with reverence that a cloud is lifted from us, and that we have served dark gods too long."

So Paullinus spoke of the Father's love and the coming of the Saviour on to the earth; and when he had finished the chiefs thanked him very courteously, and then they asked him to abide with them and speak again of the matter. So Paullinus abode there and made many friends, as his manner was.

Then came a day when the chiefs again held council, and they told Paullinus that if he would, he should be the priest of the temple and teach what he would there, and that the temple should be cleansed; and they said that they would not ask him to be the slayer of such as had killed a man, for that, they said, seems to belong rather to a warrior than a priest.

So Paullinus said that he would abide with them, but that he must first go and be made a priest after his own order; and he departed, but soon returned, and the Temple of Death was made a Church of Christians.

Paullinus is an old man now; you may see him walk at evening beside the water, under the shadow of the church. The images have been broken and defaced; but Paullinus often stops beside a mound, and thinks of the bones of the great beast that lie whitening below—and then he stands beside a grave which bears the name of John, and knows that his brother, that did evil in

the days of his ignorance, but that suffered sore, will be the first to meet him in the heavenly country, with the light of God about him; “and perhaps,” says Paullinus to himself, “he will bear a palm in his hand.”