

**PERPETUA. A TALE
OF NIMES
IN A.D. 213**

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Perpetua. A Tale of Nimes in A.D. 213 by S. Baring-Gould

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S. BARING-GOULD

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PERPETUA

A TALE OF NIMES IN A.D. 213

BY THE

REV. S. BARING-GOULD, M.A.

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PERPETUA

A TALE OF NÎMES IN A.D. 213

CHAPTER I

EST

The Kalends (first) of March.

A brilliant day in the town of Nemausus—the modern Nîmes—in the Province of Gallia Narbonensis, that arrogated to itself the title of being *the* province, a title that has continued in use to the present day, as distinguishing the olive-growing, rose-producing, ruin-strewn portion of Southern France, whose fringe is kissed by the blue Mediterranean.

Not a cloud in the nemophyla-blue sky. The sun streamed down, with a heat that was unabsorbed, and with rays unshorn by any intervenient vapor, as in our northern clime. Yet a cool air from the distant snowy Alps touched, as with the kiss of a vestal, every heated brow, and refreshed it.

The Alps, though invisible from Nemausus, make

themselves felt, now in refreshing breezes, then as raging icy blasts.

The anemones were in bloom, and the roses were budding. Tulips spangled the vineyards, and under the olives and in the most arid soil, there appeared the grape hyacinth and the star of Bethlehem.

At the back of the white city stands a rock, the extreme limit of a spur of the Cebennæ, forming an amphitheatre, the stones scrambled over by blue and white periwinkle, and the crags heavy with syringa and flowering thorns.

In the midst of this circus of rock welled up a river of transparent bottle-green water, that filled a reservoir, in which circled white swans.

On account of the incessant agitation of the water, that rose in bells, and broke in rhythmic waves against the containing breastwork, neither were the swans mirrored in the surface, nor did the white temple of Nemausus reflect its peristyle of channeled pillars in the green flood.

This temple occupied one side of the basin; on the other, a little removed, were the baths, named after Augustus, to which some of the water was conducted, after it had passed beyond the precinct within which it was regarded as sacred.

It would be hard to find a more beautiful scene, or see such a gay gathering as that assembled near the Holy Fountain on this first day of March.

Hardly less white than the swans that dreamily swam in spirals, was the balustrade of limestone that surrounded the sheet of heaving water. At intervals on this breasting stood pedestals, each supporting a statue in Carrara marble. Here was Diana in buskins, holding a bow in her hand, in the attitude of running, her right hand turned to draw an arrow from the quiver at her back. There was the Gallic god Camulus, in harness, holding up a six-rayed wheel, all gilt, to signify the sun. There was a nymph pouring water from her urn; again appeared Diana contemplating her favorite flower, the white poppy.

But in the place of honor, in the midst of the public walk before the fountain, surrounded by acacias and pink-blossomed Judas trees, stood the god Nemausus, who was at once the presiding deity over the fountain, and the reputed founder of the city. He was represented as a youth, of graceful form, almost feminine, and though he bore some military insignia, yet seemed too girl-like and timid to appear in war.

The fountain had, in very truth, created the city. This marvelous upheaval of a limpid river out of the heart of the earth had early attracted settlers to it, who had built their rude cabins beside the stream and who paid to the fountain divine honors. Around it they set up a circle of rude stones, and called the place *Nemet*—that is to say, the Sacred Place. After a while came Greek settlers, and they introduced a new civilization and new ideas. They at once erected an image of the deity of the fountain, and called this deity Nemausios. The spring had been female to the Gaulish occupants of the settlement; it now became male, but in its aspect the deity still bore indications of feminine origin. Lastly the place became a Roman town. Now beautiful statuary had taken the place of the monoliths of unhewn stone that had at one time bounded the sacred spring.

On this first day of March the inhabitants of Nemausus were congregated near the fountain, all in holiday costume.

Among them ran and laughed numerous young girls, all with wreaths of white hyacinths or of narcissus on their heads, and their clear musical voices rang as bells in the fresh air.

Yet, jocund as the scene was, to such as looked