

**ZENON, AN HISTORICAL
NARRATIVE OF THE EARLY
DAYS OF CHRISTIANITY,
IN THREE VOLUMES, VOL.II**

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Zenon, an historical narrative of the early days of Christianity, in three volumes, Vol.II by
Richard Cobbold

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RICHARD COBBOLD

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ZENON,

AN HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

OF THE

EARLY DAYS OF CHRISTIANITY.

BY THE

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"Not many mighty, and many noble, are called."—1 Cor. i. 26

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Z E N O N.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DUNGEON.

WITH his hands clasped upon his brow in an agony of terror, the horror-stricken guilty monarch tried to hide the lightning from his eyes; but the vivid flashes of conscience were more terrible than the lights of the skies. Incessantly they struck upon his soul's perception and showed him the body of Ascleterion devoured by dogs. How strange! how strange! that man should deal around him death—he himself a vile murderer, extortioner,

and cruel persecutor, and yet tremble at the sight of the very death that he had occasioned. Not that Domitian would have ever shrunk from a deed of darkness, if he had even to perpetrate it with his own hand!

Parricide and fratricide as he was, he would doom any one to death who stood in the way of his own lust and ambition. He would sacrifice any person and any thing to have men tremble before him; and yet, when the dreaded prognostication of his own death was even accompanied by the fulfilment of an augury which he had in vain tried to defeat, he caught a glance of his own sure end, and beheld in the horrors of the tempest the anger of the gods.

How different are the fruits of the correction of the true God, bringing repentance, causing godly sorrow, change of heart, change of life, humility, contrition, real alteration of dispo-

sition, and real dependence upon mercy manifested from on high, from the visitations of the demon of superstition, aggravating the malignity of the soul, provoking despair, dashing away repentance, and feeding the victim with the love of vengeance and a desire to make the deaths of others atone for his own crimes!

How different the visitation of the true God upon Flavius Clemens and his family, and upon the tyrant Domitian! Sweet peace mingled with the sorrow of Flavius and Nico-medes at their prospect of death. Grateful, very grateful for the conviction and the correction they had received, they were enjoying the fruits of a peace passing all understanding, whilst the tyrant knew no peace. The elements were spending their fury upon Rome, but they touched not the tenants of the dungeon, whilst they produced upon the mind of Domitian the most appalling effect.

Roused from his lethargic though troubled stupor, he ordered the banquet to be removed, the company to disperse, the casements to be closed, and the brilliant lamps to be suspended in his own retired closet. Thither he hastened as if he would banish the lightning of the heavens from his eyes, and the convictions of his guilt from his conscience, by the familiar glare of numerous oil-burning tapers which illumined his private room.

“Send Parthenius,” he exclaimed, as he entered that secret chamber.

“How now, thou base servant! why didst thou not see the orders of thy master fulfilled? Ascleterion was not burned—I saw the dogs devour him.”

“I could not fight against the Fates, O Emperor! Thy servant did as thou desiredst him. Ascleterion was slain according to thine order; the destructive pile was erected, the

body placed thereon, the fires kindled, and I waited to see it consumed. Could I foresee the vengeance of Jupiter? could I tell that he would command Æolus to send his blasts and raze the pile to the ground? I was terrified, I own, O Emperor! at the sudden burst of his thunderbolts, and so were all thy servants, Stephanus, Clodianus, Maximus, and even that very defier of all fears, Saturius. We could not stand against the gods, for every gate is broken, walls thrown down, temples unroofed, trees laid prostrate, the sacred groves scattered, and the very foundations of the dungeons shaken."

"Still I tell thee Ascleterion was devoured by dogs. I told thee to prevent this. Thou shouldst have seen my orders fulfilled as long as thou hadst sight, for thou hast made me a liar in the sight of all Rome: I said that the astrologer should not be eaten by dogs. He