

## ST. TELEMACHUS

Had the fierce ashes of some fiery peak  
Been hurl'd so high they ranged about the globe?  
For day by day, thro' many a blood-red eve,  
In that four-hundredth summer after Christ,  
The wrathful sunset glared against a cross  
Rear'd on the tumbled ruins of an old fane  
No longer sacred to the Sun, and flamed  
On one huge slope beyond, where in his cave  
The man, whose pious hand had built the cross,  
A man who never changed a word with men,  
Fasted and pray'd, Telemachus the Saint.  
Eve after eve that haggard anchorite  
Would haunt the desolated fane, and there  
Gaze at the ruin, often mutter low  
'Vicisti Galilæe'; louder again,  
Spurning a shatter'd fragment of the God,  
'Vicisti Galilæe!' but---when now  
Bathed in that lurid crimson---ask'd 'Is earth  
On fire to the West? or is the Demon-god  
Wroth at his fall?' and heard an answer 'Wake  
Thou deedless dreamer, lazying out a life  
Of self-suppression, not of selfless love.'  
And once a flight of shadowy fighters crost  
The disk, and once, he thought, a shape with wings  
Came sweeping by him, and pointed to the West,  
And at his ear he heard a whisper 'Rome'  
And in his heart he cried 'The call of God!'  
And call'd arose, and, slowly plunging down  
Thro' that disastrous glory, set his face  
By waste and field and town of alien tongue,  
Following a hundred sunsets, and the sphere  
Of westward-wheeling stars; and every dawn  
Struck from him his own shadow on to Rome.  
Foot-sore, way-worn, at length he touch'd his goal,  
The Christian city. All her splendour fail'd  
To lure those eyes that only yearn'd to see,  
Fleeting betwixt her column'd palace-walls,  
The shape with wings. Anon there past a crowd  
With shameless laughter, Pagan oath, and jest,  
Hard Romans brawling of their monstrous games;  
He, all but deaf thro' age and weariness,  
And muttering to himself 'The call of God'  
And borne along by that full stream of men,  
Like some old wreck on some indrawing sea,  
Gain'd their huge Colosseum. The caged beast  
Yell'd, as he yell'd of yore for Christian blood.  
Three slaves were trailing a dead lion away,  
One, a dead man. He stumbled in, and sat  
Blinded; but when the momentary gloom,  
Made by the noonday blaze without, had left  
His aged eyes, he raised them, and beheld  
A blood-red awning waver overhead,  
The dust send up a steam of human blood,  
The gladiators moving toward their fight,  
And eighty thousand Christian faces watch  
Man murder man. A sudden strength from heaven,  
As some great shock may wake a palsied limb,  
Turn'd him again to boy, for up he sprang,

And glided lightly down the stairs, and o'er  
The barrier that divided beast from man  
Slipt, and ran on, and flung himself between  
The gladiatorial swords, and call'd 'Forbear  
In the great name of Him who died for men,  
Christ Jesus!' For one moment afterward  
A silence follow'd as of death, and then  
A hiss as from a wilderness of snakes,  
Then one deep roar as of a breaking sea,  
And then a shower of stones that stoned him dead,  
And then once more a silence as of death.  
His dream became a deed that woke the world,  
For while the frantic rabble in half-amaze  
Stared at him dead, thro' all the nobler hearts  
In that vast Oval ran a shudder of shame.  
The Baths, the Forum gabbled of his death,  
And preachers linger'd o'er his dying words,  
Which would not die, but echo'd on to reach  
Honorius, till he heard them, and decreed  
That Rome no more should wallow in this old lust  
Of Paganism, and make her festal hour  
Dark with the blood of man who murder'd man.

[For Honorius, who succeeded to the sovereignty over Europe, suppress the gladiatorial combats practised of old in Rome, on occasion of the following event. There was one Telemachus, embracing the ascetic mode of life, who setting out from the East and arriving at Rome for this very purpose, while that accursed spectacle was being performed, entered himself the circus, and descending into the arena, attempted to hold back those who wielded deadly weapons against each other. The spectators of the murderous fray, possess with the drunken glee of the demon who delights in such bloodshed, stoned to death the preacher of peace. The admirable Emperor learning this put a stop to that evil exhibition.- *Theodoret's Ecclesiastical History.*]

*The Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson Poet Laureate,  
Macmillan and Co., London 1894, p.840-841*



<http://www.nd.edu/~mbaxter/cpf/sop13/Litany.htm>