

Oh, may the Bread of Life, which thou containest
My weakness strengthen.

(Draws the curtains across, concealing the Altar.)

Now, sweet Agnes, say
What errand brings my father hither, when
The Senate—if that shadow of old Rome
Deserve the title—claims his presence.

Agnes.

Ah!

Dear sister, mother, friend! for since the day
Thou savedst me from the hands of those hard men
That orphaned me, thou hast been all to me.
Faith, strength and courage summon to thy aid;
For never was more need of them than now.
Thy father, stung by dark Almachius' taunts,
Resolves to wed thee to the young Valerian.

Enter QUINTILIAN, unperceived.

Who will, he says, redeem thee from the shame
Of being a Christian.

Quintilian.

Yes! the load of shame

And foul disgrace, which thou upon our house,
Rome's first and noblest, by thy creed, hast brought.
Mehercle! how my old blood boiled to-day
Beneath that upstart's sneer. I saw, methought,
My ancestors, majestic shades around
Me hovering. Stern, reproachful looks they cast
On me, that I should have a Nazarene child.
But I have sworn this night thou shalt, must, wed
Valerian.

Cæcilia.

Father, I am Another's spouse.