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AURELIA;

OR,

THE JEWS OF CAPENA GATE.

Freely Translated from the French of M. A. Quinton

PART SECOND.—THE SLAVE.

CHAPTER VI.—HOW IN ROME A FATHER COULD SELL HIS DAUGHTER.

When Cecilius returned home, it was night.—The unfortunate man could not have said where he had been since morning. He had wandered about, with sinking heart and absent mind, trying vainly to think how he could save himself from the terrible dilemma in which he was placed.

Cecilia sat working by the light of a lamp.—Her features reflected the sadness and anxiety of her thoughts. The fearful scene of the previous day, the prolonged absence of her father who had never failed coming home for the evening meal, those complaints before the pretor, the town-prefect and the pontiff, all these strange events filled her heart with gloomy forebodings.

Then, respecting her father's orders even when they were unjustly rigorous, she had abstained herself since several days from seeing the beings dearest to her heart: Petronilla, Flavia Domitilla, Eutychia, and Ointbus, Ointbus whose betrothed she was, whose ring she wore on her finger—the pledge of a happiness she still hoped for, her only comfort when prayer failed to soothe her troubled soul.

She expected with anxiety the coming of her father, and yet at every noise that seemed to indicate his return, she trembled, like the leaf before the approaching storm. When Cecilius appeared, his haggard looks and the disorder of his garments were enough to reveal to her that something serious had occurred. She felt that she would want strength to bear the new trials which she foresaw; and she raised her eyes to heaven in mute supplication.

'Father,' she said after a pause, seeing that Cecilius remained silent, 'will you not take some food? I have prepared the dishes you like, and have kept them quite warm by the fire.'

Cecilius drew a seat without vouchsafing an answer, and helping himself to the food placed before him by his daughter, commenced eating with avidity.

Hunger and sorrow combined to overwhelm the wretched man. Thought was annihilated. Gradually, as the warm food caused his system to revive, a healthier glow spread on his pale features, and his eyes brightened. Pushing from him the empty plate, he looked at his daughter, the old tenderness overflowed his heart, and leaning his head on the table, he wept silently.

There was something painful to behold in this great sorrow, those silent tears of a father in presence of his only child. Cecilia threw herself at his feet, calling him by the most endearing names; but he rose and pushed her back with a sort of terror.

This struggle was thrice renewed; the daughter endeavoring to soothe by her caresses, the growing excitement of the father who repulsed her.

A strange fire burned in the tax-gatherer's eyes, and his features wore a dark and sinister expression.

'Cecilia,' he said at last, 'what I have to tell you is grave! You have betrayed your father and have ruined him! Child, have you reflected on the fate you have prepared for me?'

And without waiting for her answer, he added, looking at her sternly: 'My daughter, you must declare to me that you abhor those miserable Jews! that you despise their creed, and that you are ready to return to our gods!'

'Oh father, father!' cried the young girl, 'this again? you then have not understood me?'

'That's it, you cannot. And I shall be sold into slavery! and they will sell you also! We shall both be the prey of the Pontiff's and of Parmenon?'

'Who has said that, father?'

'A great jurisconsult, a man of law whom I consulted this morning. It is certain!'

'It is impossible, for you at least. As for me, if God wishes it, I am willing to suffer every thing.'

approaching his daughter, 'can you think that you are not dear to me and that your misfortune would not be mine? Oh! my daughter, I have suffered and I suffer much! I only ask one word of you, one single word. Say it; in the name of the gods I beseech you!'

'I cannot, father. Do not invoke the gods they are nothing. If what you ask of me were possible, I would do it, believe me. Strong must be your daughter's conviction in her faith, that she should resist when you beseech her for your safety.'

'My little Cecilia,' said the wretched father, clasping his daughter's hands in his; 'do you wish me to die? How could I live if you were not there? what joy would be left in my life? in this humble home? Dear hope of my old age, where will you be?'

The poor child felt her courage giving way before these loving entreaties and these tears. 'Oh! my God!' she prayed inwardly, 'help me! I did not think this trial would be so painful!'

'Do you remember your mother? Cecilius resumed: 'your mother who left you to my care a mere babe? If she were here, joining her prayers to mine, would you refuse her?'

'My mother was a worthy and courageous woman. She would understand me, and she would not ask me to break the solemn vow I have made in my heart.'

'My daughter!.... Believe in your heart if you wish; but for the Pontiff, for those who seek me, and who will come, ah! say that you are not a Christian.'

'Never, father, never! The God I adore claims the secret devotion of the soul, but He wants also that the lips should proclaim Him even before those who know Him not.'

'Great Gods!' cried Cecilius, 'I beseech this child for her life and she hears me not! I ask her to save her father, and her voice is mute?'

'Father, father! do not say that, for I can give my life for you!'

'Listen to me, child,' said the unhappy man, raising his hands imploringly. 'Listen.... You know not what is that slavery which awaits you. But I know it. When you were born your father had passed forty years in the power of a master. May the gods save you from belonging to that man whose will is law—a master. O my child! my life! my own flesh and blood. You do not know that my poor body had become hardened by continual tortures, and that Nominatus Capella, to whom I had been sold, could find but one means of inflicting pain—by loading me with irons brought to an almost red heat!'

'Horror!' cried Cecilia. 'See, child, see here!' and the wretch laying bare his arms and legs, showed his daughter the deep scars left by this cruel punishment. 'Well, I could live, because I had hope! because, by selling, day after day, half of my ration, I could accumulate a capital. I added this hunger to my other sufferings, but in the distant future, I saw freedom, and it came at last.'

'Yes, it came,' continued the old man, growing more excited under the influence of these reminiscences. 'I paid for it, to the heir of Nominatus Capella, eight thousand sesterii, accumulated painfully during the forty years privations! But I have not sufficient time before me to purchase freedom a second time if I lose it,' he cried with wild despair. 'Oh, to die a slave—to die a slave!....'

The unhappy man ceased speaking, until his oppressed chest was relieved by convulsive sobs.

'Child,' he resumed dejectedly; 'you have never known the tortures of a slave: the rod which tears, the whip with its lead-pointed lash, the red-hot blades. Would you then have those fearful sufferings?'

'Father,' said Cecilia, firmly, 'I repeat it, with the help of God, I am ready to suffer everything for Him.—And for you, also,' she added with a look of unexpressed tenderness. 'What more can you ask of me?'

'But it is not you alone! Do you not understand me?' cried Cecilius with sudden exasperation, 'it is you and I. They have told me so, and I know it to be true. Well, I will not, no, I do not want to be a slave again. And I will not be. By all the gods! they will not sell me!'

The old man's anger, softened for a moment by paternal affection, was breaking out more terrible. His excitement was fearful to behold. One would have thought that he saw a phantom advancing to load him with chains, and that he repulsed it with terror.

'No, father, you will not be a slave; no, you will not be sold,' repeated the terrified young girl. 'I cannot understand your fears. Who can have put such ideas in your mind?'

'Hush!' cried Cecilius, and fixing his burning gaze on his daughter, he asked in a husky voice: 'Tell me, do you want us both to perish?'

Cecilia understood him. It was a last su-

preme appeal, and she must weigh the filial love which filled her heart and the piety which had so recently entered her soul: she must choose between her God and her father.

'No father,' she replied solemnly, 'no, I do not wish us both to perish. I love life and liberty, if God wills that I should preserve these blessings. I want you also to live, and to live free.'

'Then renounce, those Jews and their God.' 'I cannot do it, however fearful the consequences of my refusal,' said the young girl with the same force and calmness, although she felt so faint that she leaned against the wall for support.

The old man looked at her with stupid wonder, and stepped back terrified, staggering like a drunken man.

'Oh,' he said with fearful bitterness, 'I am nothing for that child. She wishes my ruin! Parmenon can come now, I have wherewith to pay him.'

'Here I am,' said a voice. Cecilius looked round and saw Parmenon.—The infamous agent of Regulus had waited all day in the neighborhood. When Cecilius returned home, Parmenon followed him, unperceived, into the house, where, concealed behind the heavy curtain, he had seen and heard all that passed between the father and his daughter.

Cecilius showed no surprise, although he had not been aware of this man's presence in his house. Overwhelmed by his emotions, the wretched tax-gatherer felt nothing but terror and anger. When Parmenon approached him, he merely remarked, with fearful calmness: 'Very well. You come in good time. But wait a minute.'

And going to his daughter, he said to her with terrible earnestness: 'Cecilia, do you understand that I am going to sell you to this man, if you refuse to do, this very instant, what I have asked of you?'

'Father,' replied the young girl, 'I understand that I am alone concerned now, and that I save you. Do what you wish.'

But in her heart she added: 'Oh, my God! if my father were to kill me, it seems to me he would be less guilty.'

'You hear her,' said Cecilius to Parmenon, 'she is a Christian and refuses to return to our gods. I give her to you. Will you take her?'

'One moment,' quote Parmenon, who had received his instructions. 'Is it a sale you propose to make, or a payment? Do you transfer to me all your rights as a father, which would be irrevocable, or do you merely offer me a pledge as a debtor, which would be of weak and uncertain value?'

'I tell you,' cried Cecilius completely beside himself, 'that this girl has betrayed her father and her gods. I dragged myself at her feet, and she would not listen to my tearful prayer. I tell you she is no longer my child, and you can take her away. Do you hear me, Parmenon?'

'Come in men,' cried the latter. Seven men, the necessary witnesses to give validity to the act of emancipation, came in at this summons. There was an 'antestat' to certify to the agreement; a 'libripens' whose duties we have already described, and five witnesses.

'You must repeat before these persons that you manumit your daughter to me,' said Parmenon to Cecilius.

The fatal instant had arrived. The wretched father shuddered; he cast one look on his daughter, and said: 'Child, it is yet time; say a word, one word only, and it will not be you, but me, whom I will deliver to Parmenon.'

'Father, I cannot. Be free; it is my duty to suffer for you.'

A solemn pause followed, during which nothing was heard but the groans of the father and the sobs of the daughter.

At last, Cecilius extended his hand towards the child whom he had but recently called 'his life's hope,' 'his own flesh and blood,' and in a husky and scarcely audible voice, pronounced the words of the legal form: 'Parmenon, I manumit to you this girl, who is mine!....'

'And I,' said Parmenon quickly, as he grasped Cecilia's hand, 'I say that this young girl is mine by the law of the Quirites, and that I have bought her with this copper coin and these scales.'

And he went through the formalities which we have seen performed by the divine Aurelia. In Rome a daughter was but 'a thing, a chattel, relatively to her father, and her manumission required no more formalities than that of a slave or a tract of land.

'Here,' said Parmenon, throwing his torn register to Cecilius, 'you owe me nothing now.'

Cecilius was crouching in a corner of the room. He heard not; he saw nothing.

'And now, let us go,' added Parmenon.

Cecilia rushed to her father, to clasp him in a last embrace, but the old man tore himself away violently, with horrible imprecations.

Parmenon and his escort withdrew, taking along Cecilia. When they had proceeded a few steps in the street, the young girl heard a fearful cry. She looked back, and in the gloom of the night, she saw two hands extended towards her; then the noise of a body falling heavily on the pavement, struck her ears.

She would have rushed back, but Parmenon seized her roughly by the arm: 'Holloa!' he exclaimed; 'do we wish to escape already? that would be charming. Come, walk along quietly.'

They soon arrived at the slave-dealer's tavern, and the young girl, her tender limbs bruised by heavy chains, was thrown into the narrow 'ergastulum' where thirty slaves slept, confusedly packed together.

CHAPTER VII.—THE SLAVE DEALER AS A LAWYER.

The events we have just described were the sequence of the conversation between Gurgus and Eutrapietes. They had occurred a very small number of days.

Meanwhile, Flavia Domitilla, Petronilla Eutychia and Ointbus, and all the poor Jews of Capena gate who loved Cecilia and who were accustomed to see her every day, were very uneasy at her absence.

Ointbus, particularly wondered at it, and suffered the most cruel anguish, for he could not help thinking that perhaps Cecilia had abandoned the faith so recently embraced, and it was this which kept her away from the society of the faithful. She would then be forever lost to him, for how could he ever take for his companion in life, one who would have deserted her God and trampled under foot vows so recently made.

Another circumstance served to aggravate these fears, or, at least, to announce that something serious had happened: Cecilius had not been seen near the Capena gate during the week, and although his absence could not be deplored as a misfortune, since it gave the poor Jews some respite, it certainly tended to increase the anxiety and the sad forebodings of the colonists.

Ointbus resolved to unravel this mystery. In consequence, one morning, he left his mother, whose anxious fears were as great as his own, and started in the direction of the Maximus Circus—in the neighborhood of which the house rented to Cecilius by Tongilianus was situated—until the determination not to return home, until he should have ascertained what had become of Cecilia.

Upon reaching the crossing of the Triumphal Way, he saw a great crowd of people, and though little curious or inclined to tarry, he was compelled to stop, for the street was so completely obstructed that a consul's lictors could not have succeeded in clearing the way.

Ointbus inquired what was the cause of this gathering, and was told that two men were quarrelling and fighting. It was annoying to be detained by an incident of so little importance, and Ointbus would have turned away, when certain words spoken by a familiar voice made him start and awakened in him a sudden interest.

It was the voice of Cecilius, and the words, accompanied by many curses, were these: 'You wretched vespillo! infamous servant of Libitina! Purveyor of Caron! May the Styx engulf you! It is through you I have lost my daughter! Take this! and this!'

The dull sound of blows were heard, followed by groans. Evidently, the vespillo was getting the worst of the fight.

Ointbus upon hearing these words had pushed forward, elbowing his way through the dense crowd. He succeeded in reaching the front rank of spectators and saw that he had not mistaken the voice: Cecilius was belaboring a man who, although a stranger to Ointbus, was no other than our old acquaintance Gurgus.

When Cecilius fell senseless on his door step, after seeing his daughter carried off by her master, he was picked up and carried in by some neighbors who had witnessed the lamentable scene, the news of which soon spread about.—Gurgus, when he learned that Cecilia had been sold became very indignant; and, not dreaming that he had been the principal cause of this hateful transaction, hastened to the tax-gatherer's house, to crush that unnatural father under the most vehement reproaches.

But at the first word spoken by the vespillo, Cecilius recognizing him, had sprung up from the bed on which he was reclining overwhelmed with grief, and seizing a stick had struck the poor fellow three or four times with such vigor, that Gurgus had sought safety in a precipitate flight.

Cecilius animated by revenge had pursued him and brought him down with a tremendous blow across the legs. A crowd had immediately gathered around the fallen vespillo and his infuriated persecutor. The old man, incapable of appeasing his anger, was continuing to strike the helpless Gurgus, when his arm was suddenly

seized by an iron grip. It was Ointbus who had bounded near him and stayed his hand.

'Has your daughter ceased to live?' he asked tremulously.

'She lives, but it were better she were dead..... and all owing to this wretch!' replied Cecilius, still furious, although the sight of the insignia of Ointbus' military rank caused him to pause.

'What do you mean?' resumed the latter, pale and trembling with emotion. 'Cecilia is a slave?'

'Cecilia a slave?' repeated Ointbus, with a cry of horror. 'Yes.... I sold her!....' said Cecilius gloomily. 'I sold her to pay this wretch!.... What is that to you Centurion?'

And as Ointbus, sinking under this terrible revelation, made no answer, Cecilius raised his stick to strike his victim once more. But Gurgus, who had risen, avoided the blow, and the stick striking the pavement was broken by the shock.

'Fool!' cried the vespillo. 'You strike me, and there stands the man who has caused your daughter's loss.'

And he pointed at Ointbus. 'This man the cause of my daughter's loss? said the unhappy father, with stupor, 'how can that be?'

'Don't you see that it is Ointbus!..... Yes, Ointbus the Jew, the Christian,..... he was to have married Cecilia!'

'Ointbus! That man Ointbus! Oh!....' Cecilius was unarm'd, but his fingers clutched the centurion's arm with such desperate violence that the sleeve of the latter's fine white 'sagum' was stained with blood.

But Ointbus was another sort of adversary than Gurgus. With one jerk he shook off Cecilius; with one look he stopped all further aggression.

'Touch not the shield of the emperor!' he exclaimed in a commanding voice.

And perceiving some hostile demonstrations in the crowd to whom he had been designated as a Jew, he drew from the scabbard his short, broad, Spanish sword, the bright blade of which flashed in the sun.

'Make way there!' he said, contemptuously. The words and the act awed all this multitude; their ranks opened before the centurion.

'Come,' said the latter, addressing Cecilius, 'take me to your house.'

Cecilius did like the crowd; he obeyed.—Gurgus saw fit to follow them.

'Tell me now,' said Ointbus, when they had reached the tax-gatherer's house. 'What has happened? what have you done? where is your daughter?'

'I sold Cecilia because I owed this man ten thousand sesterii, which I could not pay,' replied Cecilius, designating Gurgus. 'But,' he added, looking firmly at the centurion, 'I would have given myself up if my daughter had consented to renounce those accursed Jews to whom you belong....'

'On my God, I thank you!' thought Ointbus. 'Cecilia has remained strong in your faith and your name, which she has confessed!'

'Wretched father!' he resumed, turning to Cecilius, 'did not the thought strike you that those "accursed" Jews would have saved your faith and your name, which she has confessed!'

'Wretched father!' he resumed, turning to Cecilius, 'did not the thought strike you that those "accursed" Jews would have saved your daughter by paying this man?'

'And the Pontiff who claimed twenty thousand sesterii for the sacrifice against Jugatinus? And my place?' Cecilius asked.

Ointbus not understanding this, made him relate all the circumstances with which we have acquainted the reader.

'I am much deceived,' said the centurion, 'if you are not the victim of some villainous plot. But, at all events, the twenty thousand sesterii would have been paid to the pontiff. As for your employment, do you think that Flavia Domitilla would have left the father of Cecilia, whom she loves dearly, in want? such was not her project!.... unhappy father!' added Ointbus in a commiserating and sorrowful tone. 'How much harm you have done because you would not come to those Jews so odious and despised.'

Cecilius, crushed by remorse, overwhelmed by the shame of his act, and his heart torn by the thought of his daughter, bowed his head under the weight of those simple words, and could not find words either to complain or to accuse.

Gurgus, a silent witness to this scene of woe, seemed much embarrassed. The unfortunate vespillo, first, but involuntary cause of the young girl's misfortune, felt that all was over with him. His unreluctant passion had brought him disdainful refusals, bitter disappointments, and, at last, a severe beating from which his bruised limbs were still smarting. Moreover, he felt that Cecilius and Ointbus despised him.

But Gurgus was a good-natured fellow. He