



# CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XX.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, SEPT. 3, 1869.

No. 8.

(From the Catholic Mirror.)

AURELIA;  
OR,  
THE JEWS OF CAPENA GATE.

Freely Translated from the French of M. A. Quignon.

PART FIRST. — THE INFORMER.

CHAPTER V.—(CONTINUED.)

But Paul was at Rome now, and he would doubtless overcome this contempt.

Soon after his arrival, he called together the principle men among the Jews. Before commencing the struggle and fulfilling his mission, he wished to know what he could expect from his people.

He told them what he had suffered and why he had been delivered into the hands of the Roman.

'Has any one coming from Judea, or any letter that you may have received,' he asked, 'given you cause to think ill of me?'

Those whom he had assembled answered negatively.

'But,' said the most influential, 'we would like to learn from you something about this sect, which every one here and elsewhere contradict.'

Paul spoke to them, with his magnificent eloquence, of the Kingdom of God, of Jesus Christ whose coming was announced by Moses and the prophets.

But the Jews shook their heads in sign of doubt, and only a few believed in his words.

Such was Paul's first predication in Rome.

The prophecy of Isaiah was being accomplished.

Paul had commenced with the Jews, but their hardened hearts had remained closed to his words; the time had come when he must turn to the Romans.

There lived in Rome, at that time, a great philosopher named Seneca.

Every one knows his life and his works, so full of elevated thoughts and beliefs, that Saint Jerome did not hesitate to rank him with the Christian authors, and designated him as: 'our Seneca (Seneca noster).'

This distinguished writer having incurred Nero's displeasure and fearing for his life, had moved from the Palatine to the 'Alta Semita,' one of the least populated districts of Rome where he lived in retirement and obscurity, trying to be forgotten.

He had gradually renounced the pleasures of the world, and devoted his time to study.

One day, as he sat alone, silent, and absorbed in his books, his servant announced a stranger who wished to speak to him.

The philosopher hesitated, for it might be a spy or a messenger from the Emperor, but, upon reflection he ordered the visitor to be introduced.

A man appeared on the threshold; having cast a glance at his poor garments, and his intelligent features, Seneca recognized in his visitor one of those Jews already so numerous in Rome.

He guessed right; it was a Jew, it was Paul, the Apostle, who had called on Seneca the philosopher.

CHAPTER VI.—PAUL AND SENECA.

The philosopher made a gesture of impatience, as if the visit was not altogether agreeable to him.

Paul waited in silence. His deportment was modest, but it betrayed no embarrassment.

There was a strange light about his countenance which a man like Seneca could not fail to notice. He made him sign to approach.

Paul complied, and with honorable deference, made the customary salutation of the Romans; he brought his right hands to his lips, and bowed his head from left to right.

But Seneca did not complete the ceremony by extending his hand to the new comer, as was the practice between friends.

Paul did not seem to notice the cold reserve of this first meeting, but hastened to present to Seneca the long and thin strips of 'scytale' which he held in his hand, saying:

'This is from your brother Gallion.'

The 'scytale' was a secret letter. A few sheets of thin parchment, cut in varied forms, were added together, then rolled around a small cylinder made of wood or metal, upon which they then wrote. The letter being written was unrolled and handed to the person who was to carry it.

To connect the words thus divided, it required a cylinder exactly similar to the one upon which the letter had been written, and the greatest precision and care in the manner of adjusting the parchment around it.

Seneca took the letter from the hand of the apostle, and having sought the cylinder corresponding to his brother's proceeded to perform the difficult operation of reconstructing the message.

'This letter is very old,' he remarked when he was able to read the date.

'Yes, it was handed me by your brother more than two years ago. Since, I have been a captive and I am one still. I came to Rome because I appealed to Cæsar.

'I pity you,' said Seneca simply.

The apostle made no answer, and waited for his host to accomplish his difficult task.

At last, Seneca proceeded to read the letter. From time to time, he interrupted his reading to contemplate the apostle with mingled astonishment and curiosity.

But the time had not yet come for Paul to speak.

'My brother writes me,' said Seneca when he had done reading, 'that you are a rare genius—a great orator and a great philosopher.'

'I am,' said Paul, 'only the last among the servants of God and all my strength is in Jesus Christ.'

'In fact,' remarked Seneca, without manifesting the least surprise at this strange answer, 'my brother adds that you are a Christian. Is this true, my dear Paulus—such, I believe is your name?'

'It is so true and serious a fact,' said the apostle firmly, 'and covering the philosopher with his ardent gaze, 'that in two years Nero will have me beheaded, not for the accusation now pending against me, but for the faith of my divine master.'

'What! would you give your life for this superstition?'

'At this very instant, I would! But the time has not yet come; I have a mission to fulfill, it must be terminated.'

'What may be this mission, dear Paulus?'

'To teach Rome the kingdom of God and His justice; to help Peter to found the immovable, eternal Church!'

'This Peter, I have heard of him, dear Paulus; the things he announces are strange and impossible!'

'Listen, Seneca,' said the apostle with authority, 'I tell you, in truth, you cannot understand them.'

'Am I not a philosopher, and a philosopher of some merit?' said Seneca with pride.

'The God I proclaim reveals Himself to simple hearts; He disdains the vain science of the world. He conceals Himself from the philosophers of whom you speak.'

'But what do you pretend? Will this Rome which you wish to teach, be more humble and better prepared than I am? Do you think she will listen to your voice?'

'The spirit of God will inspire me what to say, and Jesus Christ will do the remainder. Seneca! Rome, so rebellious now, shall bow her head! She will be like a little child in God's hand! Ere long, the Christians will be so numerous, that if they should go away, Rome would remain an immense desert!'

'And I, dear Paulus,' said the philosopher, smiling, 'shall I be with you?'

'No, Seneca, you shall esteem my doctrine, but you will not embrace it. You will see in it but a fine system of philosophy from which you will draw new thoughts. Posterity will find in your works certain echoes of my words and of our sacred books; but you will never go further.'

'Why so, dear Paulus? If your doctrine is the truth, I ask no better than to be numbered among your disciples.'

'One cannot become my disciple as one would become the disciple of Plato, of Aristotle, or of the other philosophers. I have told you that my God does not reveal Himself to the superb and mighty, and to follow Jesus Christ who died on the cross, one must like him carry his cross...'

'The cross! The slaves' instrument of torture! Indeed, my dear Paulus...'

'I am mad, thank you, Seneca? This is what you were about to say? Well, let it even be so, I am mad! And it is this madness I want to teach in Rome, and which will triumph of Rome and of the whole world.'

'Explain your meaning, dear Paulus, for I cannot comprehend you. The cross, Jesus Christ, the Christians, Rome, the Universe.—By Jupiter! what is all this?'

It would be impossible for us to render in all its magnificence the inspired language of the apostle, to make the divine power felt, which flashed like the lightning in the darkness of the night.

Paul first explained to the philosopher how, from a persecutor of the Christians, he had become one of the warmest advocates of the new religion.

He made an admirable picture of that religion which, tracing its origin to the earliest times, had continued to live through centuries till the present time.

He spoke of the Christ promised to the world, announced by the prophets and hailed by all the generations. He said how, the time being accomplished, Jesus had come in that poverty

which He wished to honor on earth; His divine teachings; His miracles; His death on the cross; His glorious resurrection: the predication of His apostles; the good news spreading over the world, and, everywhere, the legions of Christ assembling to glorify Him.

Raising the veil of the future, he showed the temples crumbling down, philosophy vanishing before the Gospel, the old creeds destroyed, the nations of the earth embracing the cross, mankind forming one brotherhood, and Rome the Queen of the world by Christ's standard—not of that world about to perish, but of the whole earth renaissant and regenerated!

A transfiguration had taken place in Paul; his features were resplendent with apostolic light.

Seneca listened in silent awe, crushed under those burning words which surpassed in sublimity all that he had ever dreamt.

Without, all nature harmonized with this impressive scene, as though all must hush before God's messenger. No noise disturbed the atmosphere; all was wrapped in that solemn stillness which marks the mysterious hour when prayer ascends slowly to Heaven.

A deep and silent pause succeeded the apostle's pathetic words.

'Gallion is right!' said Seneca at last, 'you are an admirable genius!'

'What matters! Seneca, it is my doctrine, not me, which you must admire.'

'Have you not told me, but a moment ago, that I would not believe? Why, then, have you come to me?'

'Because the time is near, when the religion of Christ would be for you a supreme consolation.'

'What do you mean?'

'Seneca, do you not think that a single word from Nero...'

'Ah! Paulus, are you then a messenger of death?'

'Seneca, Seneca! Christ's apostles bring life; as for death, it is in the hands of God, He it is who sends it.'

'So,' said the philosopher, with a smile, 'it is a prophecy; is the hour near?'

'Perhaps it is,' replied the apostle.

'So let it be, then, I do not fear death. I thank you for the warning.'

'Seneca, believe in Christ! Ah! you may do so yet, notwithstanding what I have said.'

'That is possible, my dear Paulus; I love all that is beautiful, and your doctrine is beautiful. But a philosopher must compare and reflect.—Come and see me again. You are friendly to me, my dear Paulus, and for my part I am inclined to love you. How I would wish to be of some service to you. But, as you see, I have now little credit.'

'I thank you gratefully, Seneca; like yours, my time is marked, and no one, not even Nero, can change the designs of God. My hope is in Him, and I need no other protection. Farewell, Seneca; in the name of the living God, think of what you have heard to-day.'

The apostle left, his heart filled with bitter discouragement, for he saw that he had not conquered this soul for Jesus Christ.

Seneca did not forget the apostle. He saw him again several times, and conversed with him on the same important subject. But Seneca was one of those men on whom extreme civilization leaves an ineffaceable stamp.

Marble is never more impenetrable than when the workman, according to the ancient saying: 'has passed his thumb over it,' to rub out the last and faint marks left by his chisel.

Seneca possessed all the elegant finish of a fine statue. The philosophy of Christianity could not penetrate that polished surface, upon which the philosophy of Greece and Rome had scarcely made an impression.

Nevertheless, he studied the Christian religion; he heard Peter and Paul; he read their epistles: he enjoyed the first fragrance of this doctrine, which, like a beautiful flower, was blooming before his eyes. He did as all do, who admire the flower, but care not to know whence it came or why it blooms. He used it to adorn his own philosophy.

He revised his works, and without modifying the original sense and plan, introduced in them new thoughts suggested by the sacred writings or by Paul's epistle.

Hence certain words and thoughts in Seneca's works, which astonish one, unless one knows whence he got them. But the truth never penetrated his mind.

A few months after his first interview with Paul, Seneca was sitting at table, with his wife, Pompeia Paulina, and two friends, when a centurion presented himself bearing the fatal sentence.

As a last favor, Nero permitted his old tutor to select his mode of death.

Seneca caused his veins to be opened, but no blood came out. He took poison, but the drug

had no effect on his worn out frame. He then ordered a hot bath to be prepared.

As he stepped into it, he sprinkled a little water over his slaves, saying:

'I make this libation to Jupiter liberator!'

A groan was heard, and a voice called out: 'Seneca! Seneca!'

The philosopher looked round: it was Paul hastening to make a last effort.

It was too late! The vapor of the bath had deprived the doomed man of his senses, and soon after he expired.

A deep sorrow could be read on Paul's face, as he contemplated the man he had sought to save.

His mission was at an end, and turning his back upon the scene of desolation, the apostle went away, plunged in thought.

CHAPTER VII.—LIGHT PENETRATING CHAOS.

Paul had soon to appear before Cæsar, to whom he had appealed. With a prince like Nero there could be no complication in judicial proceedings, and the apostle had little trouble in clearing himself of the charges brought by the Jews, and which Nero could scarcely comprehend.

What did Nero care about this quarrel between dying Judaism, and already glorious Christianity? He looked upon it as a question of local interest which did not concern him.

But Nero was very curious, and Paul was an extraordinary man. All Rome was talking of the wonders he had performed in company with Peter. For, the two apostles while preaching the religion of Jesus Christ, had, in fact, proved His divinity by numerous miracles accomplished in His name. They had healed the sick; made the lame walk, the deaf hear and the blind see, they had brought the dead back to life.

Nero, at that time, was giving the people sumptuous exhibitions, which he desired to make forever celebrated. A man had promised, like Icarus of old, to rise, flying, to the clouds.—This was Simon, the Magician, who strove by every means to rival the apostles, and to bring their mission into discredit, by claiming to perform the most wonderful acts, such as animating statues, changing stones into bread, flying in the air, and conjuring spirits.

What a good fortune for Nero, what an attraction! added to his public games, if these three men could appear there and struggle, under his eyes, for the pre-eminence in supernatural power! All three are Jews; what more simple than that he should be the judge between them!

But miracles are not made to satisfy vain curiosity. So as Jesus Christ had refused to comply with Herod's request that he should perform a prodigy, Paul replied to Nero that Simon would not triumph, but he promised nothing marvelous.

On the next day, Simon appeared in the amphitheatre. He was hailed with delight by the multitude, for his popularity was great in Rome. The Senate had even had the baseness to erect his statue in the island of the Tiber, with this inscription: 'Simon Deo Sancto!'

Peter and Paul, present, but unobserved by the crowd, were praying to God that the spirit of falsehood should not gain a victory over the spirit of truth, and that this profaner of sacred things, this enemy of His name, should not appear before the people as possessing more power than they who had been clothed with His strength, and were sent to confound imposture.

The Emperor having given the signal, Simon arose in the air, and it is alleged, hovered awhile, over the amphitheatre.

But, suddenly, he fell, hurled to the ground by the hand of God.

He was picked up, crippled and bleeding; and the people who had applauded him, now booed him with derisive contempt. The magician would not survive his shame; having been carried to a neighboring house, he threw himself from the casement, and dashed his brains out on the pavement.

Nero was far from satisfied with the tragical adventure of the magician whom he had received at his court with much favor. But, if he entertained any resentment against the two apostles, he did not show it at that time.

After all, little did Peter and Paul care about Nero's resentment.

They returned to their apostolic labors; they lived, as they had done heretofore, by the work of their hands, amidst the holy Jewish women who had followed them to Rome, and who gave to their sex those admirable examples of charity in good works, of Christian poverty, of evangelical chastity, and of all the virtues which have since created so many heroines of Christian grace, love and devotion.

Some of these women had never left the Virgin mother of Jesus Christ. Together with Saint John, they had followed her to Ephesus, where they remained until her death, which, according to the general opinion, took place in the year 48.

Since that time, they had successively removed to Rome, to join the apostles and assist them in propagating the Gospel.

Meanwhile, the holy word became more and more fruitful, and new Christians of all ranks, of all age and sex, came daily to increase the assembly of the faithful. It was then that some uneasiness commenced to be felt concerning this new sect and its numerous proselytes—this superstition which threatened to take the place of the ancient creed, or, to speak with more exactness, the old religious habits of the Roman people.

It was besides, a complete renewal of the social fabric; and some already foresaw in these recent doctrines the condemnation and final destruction of the institutions upon which Rome leaned, and which had hitherto constituted her strength. War was therefore declared against these detestable innovators who came to disturb the quiet in which, for ages past, Rome had slumbered, mistress and dominatrix of the universe.

The first hostilities were commenced by the writers and sages who denounced 'for their odious acts, those Christians, whose chief, 'one named Christ,' during the reign of Tiberius was sentenced by Pontius Pilate to suffer the most infamous penalty.'

These calumnies furnished Nero the pretext he needed to justify himself of having kindled the famous conflagration which, during six days, devoured Rome with such frightful intensity, that of the fourteen quarters composing that immense city, only four remained standing and intact.

Nero, the perpetrator of this horrible act, to shield his own criminality, dared to accuse the Christians of it. This was the true and only cause of the first persecution. It was atrocious. The most barbarous and extraordinary tortures, says Tacitus, were invented for these Christians whose crimes had long designated them to the public hate; and this went so far that the torturers felt pity for their victims.

Saint Peter and Saint Paul both perished during this persecution. Paul, the Roman citizen, was beheaded; Peter was crucified like Christ, but with his head downwards.

The two apostles suffered martyrdom on the same day—29th of June, in the year of Christ, 66.

Peter, prince of the apostles, was succeeded by Linus, who governed the Church during twelve years, as second bishop of Rome.

Linus was succeeded by Cletus or Anacletus, an Athenian by birth, and a disciple of Saint Peter, who had converted him. He governed the Apostolic See from the year 78 to the year 91.

Clemens (St. Clement of Rome), fourth bishop, therefore filled the chair of Saint Peter at the time our narrative commenced.

He was of Jewish origin and a descendant of Jacob, from his mother's side, for his father was Eustathius, a native Roman. We believe we do not err in affirming that he belonged to that Clemens family, so numerous in Rome at that time, and which was a branch of the Flavia family, whence came Vespasian and his two sons.

This more than probable hypothesis being admitted, Clemens, the head of the nascent Church and the representative of Jesus Christ on earth, would have been the relation of Domitian, the High Pontiff, in whose person dwelt all the authority of paganism.

The capital of the world, destitute of all religious faith, had become successively the centre of the most divergent philosophical doctrines, and of the most opposed creeds.

Egypt had bequeathed to it her mysterious divinities; Chaldea had sent her wizards and astrologers; from the distant countries of the East, Apollonius of Tyana had imported the philosophy of the Brachmans, the divination of the Magi, the Indian theogonies, and even the theories of the gymnosophists he had visited in Higher-Egypt and Ethiopia.

Eastern customs had already penetrated into Rome, and her priests appeared in the solemnities of the sacrifices, wearing the Phrygian tiara, and surrounded with all the sacerdotal pomp of Armenia.

The sacred books brought from Jerusalem had found public interpreters in Rome, where the Mosaic traditions were known to all. Quite recently, Josephus, a prisoner since Vespasian's time, had roused public curiosity with his numerous writings, in which the Jewish antiquities were revealed.

Gaul and Germany, represented by Valleda and Ganna, the two young priestesses, had made known the dogmas of Teutates and Odin, those northern divinities, upon whose altars our ancestors sacrificed human victims.

Finally, Christianity now loomed on the horizon, with the imposing cortege of its apostles, its first martyrs, its virgins, its venerable and holy women, whose whole life was a precept!

In appearance, the heathen divinities of ancient Rome remained in possession of the same