



# CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XX.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, NOV. 5, 1869.

No 12

(From the Catholic Mirror.)

AURELIA;

OR,

THE JEWS OF CAPENA GATE.

Freely Translated from the French of M. A. Quignon

PART SECOND.—THE SLAVE.

CHAPTER XV.—CONTINUED.

Gurges was at first thunderstruck by this double apparition; but he had got over his emotion, and his anger rising as he accounted for the presence of these two ruffians, he resolved to exterminate them if they made the least hostile demonstration. This was the cause of the extraordinary excitement manifested by the worthy vespillo.

Meanwhile, Aurelia's Numidian horsemen had succeeded in forcing a passage through the dense crowd, and her litter had stopped in front of the Pretor's curule chair. The young girl stepped out, leaning on her guardian's arm, and Flavius Clemens and Vespasian took their place by her side.

The Pretor's lictors lowered their fasces, in token of respect for the consular citizen and the heir of the empire.

Cecilia was placed opposite her mistress, who, smiling kindly, placed her hand on her slave's head. Vibius Crispus could not help starting, as Aurelia performed this first act of the ceremony of manumission, for Parmenon, followed by Regulus, had approached, and almost touched him.

Gurges actually roared with rage, and sprang forward, followed by his men, to surround the slave dealer and his companions. Olinthus imitated the vespillo's movements.

Amidst the deep silence of the anxious multitude, the Pretor asked Aurelia the motive of her appeal to justice. The young girl, her hand still resting on Cecilia's head, replied that she had come with the intention of granting freedom to the slave who had become hers by a regular act of manumission. She then added, in a firm and clear voice, which was heard by all the crowd:

'I want this young girl to be free!'

Having pronounced these words, she withdrew her hand from Cecilia's head. The Pretor then took a long, narrow wand which he extended over the slave's head, and giving her a slight blow on the cheek, pronounced the formula:

'I declare, young girl, that thou art free, by the law of the Quirites.'

The magistrate's licitor, taking Cecilia's hand, now made her turn a complete circle and let her go—a last symbolic ceremony which meant that she was free to go where she pleased.

As Cecilia turned to spring into the friendly arms opened to receive her, Parmenon rushed forward to seize her. But the slave-dealer reckoned without Gurges, who was closely watching him, and who throwing himself between him and his victim struck him a terrible blow on the face, which sent him rolling amidst the crowd. A thunder of applause greeted this act of vigor.

In order to explain the successful hit made by the gallant vespillo, we must reveal the fact that Gurges to make sure of victory had slipped his hands into a pair of iron-clad leather gauntlets, not unlike the modern instrument known as 'brass-knuckles,' and the terrible weight of which few men could resist. The slave dealer had fallen, bruised and bleeding, and was writhing with pain and rage, giving vent to the most fearful threats and imprecations, but unable to rise.

A scene of confusion and disorder ensued.—Regulus, tearing his garments, clung to the Pretor's curule chair, and clamored loudly for justice. Meanwhile, Parmenon's people attempted to throw themselves on Gurges, and avenge their master; but Aurelia's Numidians and other armed slaves coming to the rescue with the vespillo's companions, the slave-dealer's hirelings were compelled to fall back. Threats and furious clamors were heard on all sides, and the excited crowd seemed ready to take part in the conflict.

At last, the Pretor, Publius Aufidius Namusa, who had not deemed proper to prevent the struggle which, as we have already stated, generally preceded such contestations for the vindication of a claim, thought it was time to bring it to an end, and ordered hiscrier to proclaim silence, and his two licitors to restrain the multitude.

Order was instantly restored.

'Who is the citizen that claims justice?' demanded thecrier.

'I am the man!' replied Parmenon, in a voice hoarse with pain and rage; and he dragged himself forward, with the help of two of his men.

'What do you want?' inquired the magistrate.

'I want to replace my hand on the slave who has been manumitted in violation of the express stipulation of my deed of sale.'

'What clause was that?'

'That Cecilia could never be emancipated.—She has been set free! Aurelia could transfer her rights to another party, but she could not give the slave her freedom. I, therefore, claim Cecilia as my property!'

'The clause is legal,' said the Pretor, amidst the general anxiety. 'You have the right to make this claim, and I grant it, provided it is not contested.'

Vibius Crispus, assisted by Pliny the Younger, then stepped up, and declared that as Aurelia's guardian he made opposition to Parmenon's claim. He was proceeding to state the grounds of his opposition, when, having cast his eyes on the slave-dealer, he stopped suddenly, struck with stupor.

The extraordinary change which had taken place in Parmenon, was indeed likely to astonish any one. His features had lost their wonted expression of audacity, to assume that of excruciating anguish. In prey to the most abject fear, he trembled in all his limbs, a cold sweat oozing from the pores of his face, mingled with the blood that trickled from his wound. He was hideous to behold! gnashing his teeth and looking at Regulus with that expression of mute supplication which the human face assumes in presence of some terrible, unavoidable danger.

But Regulus, himself, seemed overwhelmed by a strange fear and dared not to raise his eyes.

A young citizen, accompanied by an old man, had silently wended his way through the crowd and upon reaching the Pretor's tribunal, had laid his hand heavily on Parmenon's head.

The slave-dealer turning round abruptly had seemed thunderstruck, and had fallen on his knees, upon recognizing him whose hand was thus proudly laid on him, and whose calm, penetrating and implacable gaze made him cower.

This young man was Metellus Celer, and his companion, Sosithus, the faithful freedman!

Since his arrival in Rome with his master, a few days previous, Sosithus had devoted his time to seeking some clue that would put him on the track of Lucius Metellus' murderer. He hoped that the time which had elapsed since the first investigations were made, Metellus Celer's subsequent exile, and consequently the security of impunity, might have led Phædra to return to Rome. Two days previous to the scene we are describing, Sosithus was wandering through the streets, after dark, peering into the taverns, and examining every face he met, when the sound of a voice speaking at some distance, startled him. Hastening in the direction from which the sound had come, he saw a man of tall stature leaving a house, whose door was immediately closed.

Sosithus could not see the features of this man, but his form was familiar and the faithful freedman felt his heart throb with revengeful exultation at the thought that his suspicions awakened by the voice, might prove correct. He followed the stranger who was hurrying through the dark streets, and never lost sight of him, although his aged limbs scarcely permitted him to keep up the pursuit.

After many turnings the man reached one of the taverns in the 'Villa Publica,' and knocked at the door, calling to those within in a voice that again caused the freedman to start. The door opened and closed upon the stranger, who had no suspicion that he had been followed.—Sosithus having examined the tavern and its surroundings, in order to recognize it, sought some drinking shop in the neighborhood, where he could make inquiries without raising suspicion.

There was no scarcity of such establishments in the 'Villa Publica,' and the old freedman was embarrassed only in making his choice. He selected one of the most brilliant in appearance, and being decently clad and well provided with sesterii, he found in its owner a willing and complaisant talker.

Sosithus having described the appearance and indicated the residence of the stranger, was told that it must be one Parmenon, a slave-dealer, who did a large business, and always kept a fine assortment of slaves. The inn keeper evidently held him in great esteem, and recommended him warmly to the old freedman, whom he took to be a purchaser in search of a slave-dealer.

Sosithus took good care not to deceive him, and having obtained all the information he sought, bade him good night, promising to call again soon. The old man then hastened to join Metellus Celer, to inform him that he felt almost certain that he had discovered Phædra, concealed under the name of Parmenon, and keeping a slave tavern in the 'Villa Publica.'

It was surely Parmenon whom Sosithus had followed; but the question was whether Parmenon and Phædra were one and the same person.

Metellus Celer, who, necessarily, had to act with circumspection, wished Sosithus to ascertain positively this fact, before taking any decisive steps.

On the next day Sosithus returned to the 'Villa Publica,' and found Parmenon exhibiting his slaves to the crowd. The cautious old man, concealed behind a pillar, remained for long hours scrutinizing the features of the slave-dealer—anxiously watching every muscle of that hideous face. But Parmenon was so strangely disguised by the numerous scars which had eaten deep into the flesh, distorting every feature, that Sosithus hesitated to recognize Phædra under this inscrutable mask. It was the same voice, the same treacherous eye, the same tall form and ruffianly insolence, and yet it might not be Phædra.

Sosithus after witnessing the sale of Cecilia, returned home, wavering in his first suspicions and almost discouraged.

'Very well,' remarked Metellus Celer, when his old freedman related to him these facts, 'tomorrow I shall go, myself, to the Villa Publica, and, by all the gods! if that man is Phædra, I will recognize him!'

When Metellus went to the tavern, on the next day, Parmenon was not there: he was closeted with Marcus Regulus.

The informer had heard of Aurelia's projects, and ascertained the hour at which she would go to the Forum. He was, in consequence giving his last instructions to his accomplice and making him rehearse the part he would have to play before the Pretor.

Metellus Celer waited a long time near the tavern, hoping that the slave-dealer would return: but he finally became convinced that further delay was useless when the usual hour for the public sales was past.

'I shall come again to-morrow,' said the young man. He had resolved not to leave Rome until he had examined this clue, however vague and uncertain, by which he might possibly find his father's murderer.

He was returning by the Forum, the nearest way to Aurelia's house, where, notwithstanding the advice of Vibius Crispus, he wished to see the Grand Vestal once more, when, at the entrance of the place he found his progress impeded by the dense crowd assembled to witness Cecilia's emancipation.

The young man recognized Aurelia's Numidian horsemen, who, mounted on their high steeds, towered above the crowd, and a cry of joy escaped his lips. Why had he not remembered it sooner? She was there to manumit Cecilia, and the young slave having been bought from Parmenon, this man whom he suspected of being his father's murderer, must doubtless be present also.

Like an echo of his own exclamation, another cry rose from the midst of this multitude which hid the tribunal from his eyes. This sound which made Metellus and his faithful Sosithus start and exchange a look of triumphant hope, was the cry of pain and rage uttered by Parmenon as he fell under the dexterous blow of the valiant vespillo.

Metellus pressed forward, followed by Sosithus, the people opening their ranks before him as if they foresaw that a new incident of powerful interest was about to occur. Having reached the wide circle formed by the licitors of Aufidius Namusa, Metellus laid his hand on the slave-dealer, and in a loud voice, pronounced this single word:

'Phædra!'

The trouble of the wretch when he heard this familiar and terrible voice, and felt the contact of this sovereign hand, left no doubt in the young Roman's mind.

Concentrating in his look all the hatred and revengeful fury that filled his soul, he added with the same terrible calmness of tone:

'Phædra, you recognize me! I have got you, at last! See!'

His sharp sword had cut open Parmenon's toga, and he pointed to the letters 'L. M.,' branded on the wretch's shoulder, and which proved that he was the property of Lucius Metellus.

A short and fearful pause ensued, during which they bystanders contemplated this strange scene with silent stupor. Then Metellus raised the short, sharp blade, and plunged it into the breast of Phædra:

'Murderer of my father,' he cried in a voice of thunder, 'let tartarus receive you!'

Phædra fell like a heavy mass; one convulsive shudder shook his powerful frame, and he was dead.

The awe-stricken multitude recoiled with a cry of horror; and the Pretor, who did not know Metellus Celer, ordered his licitors to seize the man who had desecrated his tribunal by the murder of a citizen.

The young man smiled disdainfully.

'Aufidius Namusa,' said he, turning to the magistrate, 'when has a master, in Rome, lost

the right of putting his slave to death? I am Metellus Celer, and this man, who murdered my father, was my slave. Do you understand now what I have done?'

The Pretor declared that Metellus Celer had acted rightly; and there being no other case for trial, he left the Forum.

'This is the day of justice!' said Metellus. 'Young girl,' he added, addressing Cecilia, 'you have never been a slave for this Parmenon had no right to buy you. But yet, he remarked, pointing to Aurelia, 'remember always with what generous kindness that noble hand rested on your head.'

Cecilia, prostrate at Aurelia's feet, kissed her hands and bathed them with grateful tears, more elegant than words.

Petronilla, the sublime virgin, had fallen on her knees, and with eyes raised to heaven, gave utterance to her joy in the sacred language of the canticles:

'Lord, the glory of Thy name hath manifested itself! . . . O terrible and good God, Thy right hand hath crushed the strong and raised the child! . . .'

Cecilia ran to her, and they held each other in a long and tender embrace.

She then went to her father who clasped her in his arms and wept; and she held out her hands to Olinthus and Gurges. But the joyful emotion of being surrounded by all she loved was too much for the poor child who had suffered with so much fortitude, and she fainted.

'Glory to God! Praise be the Lord's holy name!' repeated the pious Christian women, as they surrounded Cecilia and tried to revive her.

'Dear Aurelia!' said Flavius Clemens and Vespasian, to their young relation, 'you have been the chosen instrument of Providence!'

The young girl gave them a long, sad look, but made no reply. She did not even smile, and when she stepped into her litter, her pale face was bathed in tears. Cries of wild enthusiasm greeted her, but she remained pensive and indifferent, absorbed in the secret thought which was gnawing at her young heart.

As Metellus followed the crowd which was slowly wending its way out of the Forum, a man approached him and whispered in his ear:

'Metellus, this is the second time I have found you in my way . . . Take care that we do not meet a third time.'

The young man turned round to see who had spoken, and recognized Regulus flying by the sacred way.

A few minutes later, silence reigned in the deserted Forum.

PART THIRD.—THE VESTAL.

CHAPTER I.—BEFORE THE STORM.

A few months have elapsed since the events that filled the first parts of our narrative. The physiognomy of Rome has changed, because there is one man more in the great city, and that man is the Emperor Domitian. His presence is a perpetual threat, and who knows but it announces the realization of the fearful schemes conceived before his departure and matured during his absence?

And yet, we shall find the various characters of our story in comparative quiet. Persecutors and victims are equally at peace, and nothing shows that a storm is brewing overhead.

The poor Jews of the Capena-Gate have celebrated with touching rejoicings the wedding of Cecilia and Olinthus. Flavia Domitilla and Aurelia have secured by their generosity, joy and abundance under the roof of the young pair.

We therefore now find Cecilia a matron, and she carries this new title becomingly. Her graceful face has recovered the bloom of health and youth; and no trace remains of her past sufferings, save a tinge of melancholy which adds a new attraction to her classic style of beauty.

Olinthus has rented a comfortable house in the Palatine, so that Cecilia should not be far from Flavia Domitilla, whose mission of mercy she still shares; from Aurelia, who is never happier than when the young matron visits her, and from Cornelia who would like to keep her forever in the Atrium Regium.

But Cecilia cannot forget the poor exiles of the Capena-Gate—Petronilla, Eutychia, and all those who love her so well—her longest and most frequent visits are for the little colony of Christians. There is so much misfortune to relieve, so many tears to dry, in that unwholesome and neglected section of Rome. If Cecilia was moved with compassion when she was a stranger for those unfortunates, how much more she must feel for them now that she has become their sister by the double ties of faith and gratitude.

She would not be rich. She asked those generous friends who wished to share their wealth with her, to leave her at least some of the poverty of Christ. But when some great want is felt among her poor brethren, she runs to Flavia Domitilla, or better still, to Aurelia, or

to the Grand-Vestal, to teach them how to open their heart to the sweetest enjoyments of the greatest of Christian virtues.

Cecilia has evidently an object in doing this; but she does not speak of it, and she selects indirect means to accomplish it; this is often the surest and quickest way to arrive at one's end. Cecilia is happy now; happy in her faith in the love of Olinthus; happy in the affection she has inspired others, for the feelings which our acts awaken resemble the perfumes which act on the senses: they penetrate the most modest souls.

The young matron, notwithstanding her youth and humble condition, shed, without knowing it, a sort of halo around her. The Christians of Capena Gate venerated her almost as much as Petronilla, and this was natural; she was the only one among these men and women who had the glory to suffer for Christ's sake and to confess his name. In the household of the consul, Flavius, the like pious homage was rendered the courageous girl, mingled with a lively gratitude for her devotion to the security of this noble family.

From Aurelia and the Grand-Vestal, Cecilia received equal marks of affection; but Aurelia's friendship was free from the calculations of self-interest which influenced, perhaps too much, Cornelia's feelings.

The Grand-Vestal had resumed her ministry in the Atrium Regium, and Metellus Celer, following the prudent advice of Vibius Crispus, had left Rome, to seek an inaccessible retreat. But he wrote from time to time, to Cornelia, and his letters were handed her by Cecilia who received them from an unknown messenger.

Between the Grand-Vestal and the young man, there was more than the austere sentiment resulting from gratitude; a more tender feeling had crept, unwittingly in their hearts. Cornelia's love was the more vehement, for being the first bright dawn of happiness, lighting up the darkness of a life consumed by despair. She had only one year to wait to recover her freedom, and then! . . .

But will Metellus Celer, the young knight of twenty-eight wed the virgin whose beauty has faded amidst the bitter regrets of long years of solitude? Will he not hesitate before the fatal omens attached to the marriage of vestals relieved of their vows at the age of thirty six years? Will his love be stronger than these obstacles? Cornelia suffered in secret, all the tortures of doubt, for she dared not confide to any one, the fears and hopes which alternately filled her heart.

Cecilius enjoyed perfect happiness near his daughter and the young centurion whom he proudly called son-in-law. The ex-tax gatherer's opinion concerning those accursed Jews he formerly persecuted with so much rigor, had undergone a great change. He was seen frequently in the neighborhood of the Capena-Gate, but it was not, as of old, to carry desolation among the poor exiles; Cecilia, it was said, had become a Christian, saw none but Christians, and faithfully attended all their assemblies.

Caius-Tonglianus-Vespertinus Gurges, was no longer a simple vespillo. His father had handed him the sceptre of Libitina, and he was now one of the most respected citizens of the neighborhood of the Maximus Circus. Nevertheless, Gurges asked no woman to come and share the honors of his new dignity; and he replied to those who advised him to marry, that it would be time enough to think of it, when the gods would show him another Cecilia.

It will be seen that Gurges had remained a worshipper of Venus Libitina, his favorite divinity, but this did not keep him from calling as frequently as possible, at the house of Cecilia and Olinthus, those two Christians who, from time to time, made some friendly attacks on his religious ideas.

But Gurges held that all religions are good, provided one is an honest man. Evidently, Gurges was a great philosopher.

The new undertaker of funerals had finally ceased all commercial transactions with Eutrapeles; so completely, indeed, that the funeral agent who would have dared to rob the grave of a handful of hair or a single tooth, for the benefit of the barber, would have been immediately expelled from the honorable corporation of Libitina.

Gurges had a deep grudge against Eutrapeles about the matter of Parmenon's register. He contended that the tonor should have been more far sighted, and not get a friend involved in such trouble.

Eutrapeles never spoke of this adventure in which he had been indirectly mingled. It caused him some anxiety, for the high dignity with which he hoped to see his zeal rewarded. He endeavored to conjure the disastrous effects of this unlucky affair, by devoting himself still more to the political education of his magpie, and by praising loudly a treatise on the 'art of preserving the hair,' recently written by Domitian. (Suet. in Domit. Cap. 18. This au-