

The Wheat of Christ.

(By Milton E. Smith in Rosary Magazine.)

(Continued.)

The words of her father alarmed Lavinia. While she had no fears for her mother and herself, she grieved at the thought of her father risking his life while still unconverted. With tears streaming down her cheeks, she said:

"I ask but one favor of thee, my father. It is that thou forgive our enemies. Remember, thou mayest be put to death before thou hast time to seek the truth. Thy immortal soul is at stake. Then, grant thy daughter's prayer."

"I can refuse thee nothing, my child, but I would have preferred to lose my right arm rather than to promise to forgive my enemies. As thou art much stronger, I shall go to Rome to-morrow and see Tibertius."

"Do him no harm I beg of thee. Leave him to the anger of God. It may be that, like Paul of Tarsus, the scales shall fall from before his eyes and that he may become a great Christian."

"Thy wishes, my child, shall be respected. Now I bid thee farewell for a time, but I may not say 'the gods protect thee.'"

Verus started for Rome on his arrival he was soon admitted to the presence of Domitian, who received him with every mark of favor because of his heroic deeds in war.

"We honor thee, noble Verus," said the Emperor, "for thy courage against our enemies in distant Britain, and thou shalt tell us of that strange country whose chalk hills invited our fathers to conquer it for Rome. Hast thou recovered so thou canst go back?"

"As soon, noble Emperor, as I have found justice at thy hands. Know thou that whilst I was toiling, fighting, risking my life for thee, a puny sycophant, who is in love with my daughter, plotted treason against my household because she spurned his offer, and that by his orders my noble wife, Marcella, is now in prison and that I, after my long absence, have been refused permission to visit her."

"What is the name of the wretch that dared to insult the noble wife of my brave Verus?" demanded the Emperor in a passion, as he rose from his marble curule chair that he might give force to his words.

"Tibertius, Sire."

"By Minerva, he shall die," roared Domitian. Then he ordered a guard to bring the wretch to the praetorium at once.

Scarcely had the command been given before a Numidian started to find Tibertius. He was presently brought in, and stood on the catasta, trembling with fear.

"Tibertius," exclaimed the Emperor, "hast thou dared to harm the household of my brave Verus? If thou hast, by the gods I swear twenty strokes of the plumbatae shall be given thee by Ulic, the chief of my Numidians."

Tibertius would have fallen, but was supported by a Numidian, who held him while he spoke.

"Divinity," he said, faltering, "in the fulfilment of thy royal commands to bring to justice all who in the name of the Christ conspire against thy empire, Marcella hath been arrested. The centurion who brought her to Rome from her Antium villa reports he thrice offered to release her if she would sacrifice to the gods, but she most stubbornly refused. He also reports that she is a Christian and hath defied thy power to punish her. If I have offended thee, Divinity, I most humbly beg thee to remember that I only tried to be loyal to thy commands, that are to me the commands of the gods, of whom thou art most worthy to be the chief."

The face of Domitian was scarlet when he addressed Tibertius; now it was white with rage as he turned on Verus, saying in a loud voice:

"Hast thou, Verus, nursed treason in thy house while pretending to be loyal to my empire? By Apollo, it will go hard with thee if Tibertius hath not lied. Speak, tell me on thy honor as a soldier whether thou hast permitted thy wife to become one of that treacherous set of Christians?"

"Sire," replied Verus firmly, "to be looked defiantly into the face of Domitian, I know nothing of these things. My life has been spent upon the field of battle amidst charging squadrons, so that I know nothing of what men believe, nor does it concern me in the least, so they are ready to serve the Empire when called upon. I am a soldier, not a philosopher."

"Silence!" thundered Domitian in a rage. "Tell me what I wish to know from thee. Hast thou permitted thy wife to become a Christian?"

"Sire, I have neither permitted nor denied to her the right to be guided by her own conscience. When she became my wife she did not become my slave, but I became her friend and protector. She hath the right to worship as she thinks best."

"I can refuse thee nothing, my child, but I would have preferred to lose my right arm rather than to promise to forgive my enemies. As thou art much stronger, I shall go to Rome to-morrow and see Tibertius."

"Do him no harm I beg of thee. Leave him to the anger of God. It may be that, like Paul of Tarsus, the scales shall fall from before his eyes and that he may become a great Christian."

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otherwise, all worship is a sham and cannot be pleasing to the gods. But he who says the noble Marcella is a traitor, lies, and this sword, never drawn but in the defense of Rome, shall avenge her."

"Be cautious, Verus," replied Domitian, surprised at the bold spirit of the old soldier; "if thy wife is a Christian she shall die, and unless thou burn incense in honor of the gods whom thou hast offended, thou shalt suffer. I now command thee to throw incense into the vase before Juno, that thou mayest purge thyself of all suspicion."

"Sire, were I a Christian I would not deny it, were all the gods ready to strike me dead. I fear neither the gods nor man, but have served thee through love. If thou hast lost faith in me, and my country hath no further use of my services, I am willing to die, now that thou hast given me cause to believe that my battles, my hunger, my thirst, my wounds, and my separation from my home have been in vain. I have no objection to burn enough incense in yonder urn to strangle the entire court with the smoke, but if my long services in the field are not sufficient testimony of my loyalty, I shall give no other."

Turning his back upon the Emperor, Verus walked out of the praetorium, and no one dared try to detain him as he held his sword firmly in his hand, and his sword firmly in his hand.

Tibertius had won, and the Emperor congratulated him for his zeal and promised to advance him.

The following day Verus was admitted to the Mamertine to see his wife. He found her, to his great surprise, happy and willing to die. She begged her husband not to attempt to rescue her, as it would be useless; for should they escape they could not live in any portion of the Roman Empire.

"Had I but my legions with me," exclaimed the old soldier, "I would pull down this prison, stone after stone, and teach the tyrant how to govern his people. He thinks I fear him—I who for years have led my men into the thickest of the fight, fiercest. I who fear neither the gods nor man, will show Rome how a soldier can die. As long as I have the use of my arm, I'll fight for thee, my love, my life."

"My noble husband, think not of showing Romans how a soldier can die, but how a Christian can give his life to God from whom he received it. This is to be thy wife's precious privilege now, and later it will be thine, for I shall offer my life for thee. When I am dead the light will come to thee, if it come not sooner. Then thou wilt know how our dear Lord died on Calvary for us, how He, who could have called legions of angels to defend Him, permitted the Jews most cruelly to crucify Him, and at the last moment prayed for His enemies. If the Son of God permitted this, why should we poor mortals talk of resisting those who persecute us. Let us rather accept the teachings of Jesus, and pray for those who would put us to death for His sake."

In that gloomy prison, where the sunbeams never penetrated, the first ray of eternal light came to Verus, and falling upon his knees he cried:

"I believe what thou believest, thy God is my God, what thou sufferest, I will suffer. Never again shall this faithful sword be drawn to fight the battles of thy persecutors. I will seek the truth and confess it in spite of a thousand Domitians. I go, but I will come again to remain with thee."

A few days later Verus entered a small house near the bath of Philip in the Rione de Monti, and was soon in the presence of the Holy Pontiff Clement, who received the stranger with a kind, fatherly welcome.

"I have come to thee as the agent of Christ," said Verus, "to be instructed in the mysteries of thy religion. I am the husband of Marcella, now in the Mamertine. God in a moment made me believe what I do not pretend to understand. I desire to be taught that I may be baptized, so as to be ready for the fate my noble wife craves, and which I fear she will receive before I can prepare to have the crown of martyrdom bestowed upon me—for I am a soldier."

"I have heard of thee, Verus," answered the Pope, in a sweet voice, "and know how true thou art, and as thou hast received such a signal blessing through the prayers of one destined to wear a martyr's crown, thy baptism shall not be long delayed."

Clement then talked to him for some time and sent him to the priest Severus for further instruction, telling him to come back in five days for baptism.

After arranging with Severus as to the time of his instruction, Verus went to his villa to visit Lavinia, who was quite ill. Then he made one or two visits to the Mamertine where he remained with her until the end, but the officer in charge of the prison refused him permission to prolong his visit or to come again. When he said good-bye to Marcella, she remarked:

"Farewell, Verus, but it will not be for many days. The time is coming when we shall be together for eternity."

"God grant that thy words are prophetic," replied Verus as he went out of the prison.

When the water of regeneration had been poured upon the head of Verus, all fear of death for himself

or wife disappeared, if it had not previously left him, and his only fear was for his daughter, left with Sylvia and the servants at Antium. He knew that Tibertius had caused the arrest of Marcella, that he might force Lavinia to accept him for a husband, so that he would inherit the estate. But Verus was too busy in Rome to make an extended visit to his villa at that time, for Marcella was to be tried by the Emperor within a few days. So the old soldier had to be contented with a hasty visit to his daughter, feeling that it might be the last, for he knew that he would soon be accused of being a Christian and he was prepared to suffer the consequences.

THE FLIGHT.

Verus was on his way to Antium, and had stopped at Laurentum to feed his hungry horses when he was approached by a young Roman whom he did not recognize.

Bowing gracefully to the General, the young man said:

"I would talk with thee, noble Verus, on a question of great importance. I am Demas."

"The son of Hypothes," interrupted the General. "I am glad to see thee, for all the reports I have had of thee are most flattering. But my stay here will be brief, so we must talk quickly. I am on my way to Antium and must speedily return to Rome."

"It is of thy noble daughter I would speak with thee. I was at one time a friend of Tibertius, but he deceived me; now he seeketh my life because I like thee, I have fled from him. The words and example of thy noble wife to accept the teachings of Christ, I implore thee to send thy daughter away or she will be seized by Tibertius against her will and forced to marry him."

"Demas, I know the noble Marcella will soon receive the crown of martyrdom, and I hope also for the same. But I think we should do as thou advisest and try to guard our lamb from the wolves. But how can this be done?"

"I have for thee, noble Verus, a letter from the Holy Pontiff. Here it is. He commendeth thy humble servant, and asketh thee to place thy daughter in my care to be taken to Pontus, where she will be safe until the pretorian hath spent its fury. If thou wilt consent, I will go with thee to Antium, and when thou hast taken leave of the noble Lavinia, I will sail with her and the faithful Sylvia to Pontus. I shall go at the request of the Pontiff, who knoweth that I prefer to remain in Rome and share in the glory awaiting the followers of the true God."

Verus read the letter hastily, and turning to Demas, said:

"It is well, and I thank the good Lord that Holy Pontiff has spared for, as the Holy Pontiff says, she may be reserved for a great work. We will now hasten to Antium. Tonight thou wilt start for Ostia, where thou wilt find a ship to take thee to Chalcidion in Bythinia. From there thou must go to Cherson where I have a friend who will protect thee with his life. I saved his family from extermination, and he has never forgotten my kindness. Remember, my friend, that I confide to thee a precious jewel, knowing that thou wilt guard her from all danger, and that thou wilt keep in mind the fact that she hath been deprived of her natural protectors by the enemies of our Divine Lord."

"With my life, noble Verus, will I guard thy daughter, not only on account of my respect for thy family, but as an act of obedience to our Holy Pontiff, who hath charged me with this important mission."

Lavinia was suffering terrible distress on account of the imprisonment of her mother and the absence of her father. When Sylvia announced the return of the latter, she rushed to greet him, before he had passed through the atrium. Throwing her arms around his neck, amidst her sobs, she cried:

"Tell me, my dear father, of my noble mother. Will she not soon return to us?"

"My child, forget not that thou art a Christian, and ready at all times to bow to the decrees of the Most High. Thy mother is happy, though still in prison, and may not be released until her soul is permitted to enter into everlasting rest. Her only cause of sorrow is her concern for thee. She is persuaded that it is not the will of God that thy trials are to end as speedily as her own and those of thy father."

"Art thou, too, in danger, dear father?" interrupted the weeping girl.

"Not in danger, my child, but in the line of promotion. You know how proud we were when the Emperor advanced me in grade. Now I trust the great King will advance me to a place in comparison to which no earthly honors are to be thought of. I have not been arrested, but await calmly the will of God. I know that thou, my child, like thy mother, wilt not rebel, let His decree be what it may. Once my chief delight was to do the will of the Emperor. Now it is to do the will of God. I have lived many lustres, but have just learned the meaning of happiness and where it may be found. We should be thankful that we have found it, and that no earthly power can rob us of it. But my time is limited, and we must now arrange for thy departure. Thou wilt go with noble Demas to Pontus, where thou wilt be protected by a friend of mine until the storm is past and the Church enjoyeth peace once more."

The tears were dried on the cheeks of the poor girl by these words of her father, which he uttered with a calmness surprising to all who do not know how perfect was the faith of the early Christians.

After greeting Demas, Lavinia began to prepare for her departure for the Far East. At any other time, and under other circumstances Lavo-

nia would have been sorely grieved to go away from the home of her childhood, but now her heart was filled with a holy peace because she was doing the bidding of the Supreme Pontiff, and she did not for a moment ask herself whether she had better go or remain.

Verus appointed his steward, Sembar, his agent, and instructed him to take care of the estate until he or Lavinia should come to claim it.

While the golden sunset was changing into purple tints, and the shadows of advancing night were gathering over the villa, Verus took his last walk through the beautiful grounds. For a moment he stopped before some favorite tree or lake where he had often spent happy hours with his wife, planning for the future, never dreaming that the day would come when she would be in prison and he longing for the time when he could join her there. Tears gathered in the old veteran's eyes; but faith triumphed, and he thanked God for the light that had made him a changed man.

The chariot was brought to the vestibule, and Verus, Lavinia, Demas and Sylvia started on their night ride for Ostia. Arriving there about midnight, they found a ship ready to sail. The final farewell was spoken and the father and child saw each other for the last time. Verus stood motionless on the shore gazing into the darkness, which was only dispelled by the light of the twinkling stars. He saw the ship glide gracefully away like a shadow, while in the gloom a white object was observed gently moving amidst her masts and cordage. It was Lavinia, waving her handkerchief as a last token of love for the father she would meet no more this side of the tomb.

After a long voyage, which to Lavinia seemed unending, they landed at Chalcidion, from where they took another ship for their final destination in Pontus. It would indeed be impossible to describe the suffering of the maiden on that long journey; her mother in prison awaiting trial which was almost certain to end in a cruel death, her father in danger, and she an exile, flying, at their bidding, from her parents. Gladly would she have gone back to Rome to share their fate and with them receive a martyr's crown.

At Cherson Lavinia was received kindly by the old Greek, who escorted her to his house and expressed great pleasure in being able to show a little courtesy to the daughter of the man who had saved himself and his family from assassination. Demas longed to return to Rome to prepare for ordination, but his instructions were to remain near Lavinia and watch for her enemies, who, it was expected, would follow her in exile. He soon discovered, no matter where his lot was cast, there was work to do for the cause of Christ. Quietly he commenced to teach the truth and soon he had the satisfaction of seeing many become Christians. Lavinia had brought a number of jewels with her which were sold and the money used for works of charity. Among the first to listen profitably to her words of instruction was her father's old friend Euerus. For six months Demas and Lavinia remained in Cherson, employing their time principally in spreading the faith. When they found how many souls they could lead to Christ, they no longer wondered that their desire for martyrdom had not been gratified.

A few days after the flight of Lavinia, a man clad in a long toga, with a scarf wound round his head and face, stood late at night on the bridge Emilius. His eyes swept the sky, and he riveted his attention on the stars that had just emerged from the dark vapors, clouds which hung over the Palatine as though he would read the secrets of the silent sentinels of his own land and of his father's.

"Hath it come to this," he thought "that Nicassius, the son of a Greek noble, should be engaged in a conspiracy against a noble maiden whose only crime is that she will not marry a base Roman noble? Would that I could consult the Pythia of Delphi and learn what evidence Tibertius hath of my complicity in the murder of one of the Pretorian Guards. It was my brother who struck the fatal blow, although I shared in the booty. Did I know that he could not have the punished, I swear by the gods of Olympus that I would have nothing to do with this matter. Lavinia was always kind. Now I must abdicate her before she is spirited away by the Christians. Well, it may be for her own good that I should seize her and hide her in some dark place in the Campagna until she is willing to become the wife of the noble Tibertius; otherwise, she might become food for the beasts of the amphitheatre or meet with a still more horrid fate." The thoughts of the Greek were disturbed by the approach of a chariot, which stopped not far from the place where he was standing. In a few minutes he was addressed by a well-known voice:

"So, my man, thou hast been faithful for once. It is well, and thou wouldst have found that Tibertius knows how to punish as well as reward. Art thou ready for the trip to Antium?"

"Nicassius hath told thee, noble Tibertius, that he would serve thee; that is sufficient. Unfold thy plans, and they shall be carried out to the letter."

"Thou appearest surly to-night. Art thou plotting treason? Beware."

"No, I would not need to plot to rid myself of this work, did I not fear thee. But this will be the last service Nicassius will render thee; for after to-night thou wilt be as much in my power as I am in thine."

"What meanest thou, wretch?"

"The noble Tibertius can call me hard names now, but not after to-night, for I swear by Demas that the time will come when I shall be in fact, as in name, a freeman. But we waste words. Tell me what thou

wouldst have me do."

Tibertius was angry, but he knew from experience that he would gain nothing by a war of words with the Greek; so he controlled his wrath and said:

"Thou wilt go in this chariot to Antium and conduct the noble Lavinia to my villa at Caricles, and there have her confined with no companion but her maid, Sylvia, until thou hearest from me. On thy life be careful that she is treated as her rank and her dignity as the future wife of Tibertius demand. Here is a purse to defray thy expenses, and remember that the most extreme prudence must be shown at every step. Now go, and may the bright goddess Venus help thee."

Without making reply, Nicassius sprang into the chariot and ordered the charioteer to proceed by a secluded route to Antium. He arrived at the villa early the next morning and was agreeably surprised to discover that Lavinia and Sylvia had flown. He was informed by a servant that they had departed a few days previous to his arrival, going in the direction of Ostia. Nicassius returned to Rome and reported the facts to Tibertius. He was ordered to go at once to Ostia, and ascertain from the shipping men whether Lavinia had sailed for a distant port. He was also instructed to pursue her as soon as he learned where she had gone, and to communicate with Tibertius, who said he would follow as soon as he had the estate confiscated and turned over to himself.

Fearing the power of Tibertius, Nicassius determined to serve the young noble until he had secured possession of Lavinia, and then he would defy him. The Greek went to Ostia and there met a former slave of Verus, who told him that Lavinia and Demas had gone to Chalcidion. While he was at Ostia Tibertius arrived, and at once ordered Nicassius to take a ship for Chalcidion, to keep watch on Lavinia, and, if necessary, to kill Demas.

VI.

THE MARTYRDOM.

The day of the trial of Marcella had come, and Domitian determined to be her judge, hoping that he might induce her to deny her faith and make libations to the gods. He did not wish to lose the services of such a skilful general as Verus, and he feared the old soldier would no longer lead his legions to battle should Marcella be put to death. The trial took place in the pretorium. Domitian sat on his curule chair, and Marcella stood on the catasta. Scarcely had the Emperor taken his seat before there was a slight disturbance. He rose that he might see the cause, fearing that an effort might be made to assassinate him. Seeing the pretorians trying to hold back Verus, who was endeavoring to reach his wife, Domitian commanded that the old soldier be brought before him. When he approached, the Emperor said:

"Verus, what meanest thou that thou createst a disturbance before my face? Hast thou forgotten where thou art?"

Without changing his defiant attitude, Verus replied:

"Sire, I was trying to approach to the side of my wife, where duty calls me; for no man is worthy of the name who abandons his wife in the hour of her trial."

"Thou speakest well, Verus, and thou hast a right to be with the noble Marcella, and it is my wish, nay, my command, that thou in thy mature judgment counsel thy wife that she may answer properly the questions I shall ask her before restoring her to thee."

Order having been restored, the trial commenced. The Emperor said: "Noble Marcella, it hath grieved me that thou hast been disturbed at thy home and brought to Rome, and I have especially ordered that thy trial should not take place until I could preside. Thou wilt now gladly purge thyself of the charge of treason and renew thy loyalty to the gods. Dost thou deny being a Christian and an enemy to the Empire?"

Marcella raised her eyes towards her imperial master, and a light came into them as though it were reflected from an ethereal lamp. Not a sign of fear was visible on her pale cheeks, and in calm, distinct voice she replied:

"Sire, I shall never deny my Savior. He died for me and for thee, and those who deny Him show how unworthy they are to have been made the objects of His love. That I am a traitor to the Empire I most emphatically deny, for Christ teaches us to be obedient to our lawful rulers in all things not sinful. He commands us to 'render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.'"

A shadow passed over the face of the Emperor, and in a loud voice he said:

"Knowest thou that neither thy position nor thy husband can save thee if thou refusest to honor the gods?"

"Sire, I know that neither thou nor thy false gods could save me. Did I deny Christ?"

"Then thou darrest to brave my wrath? For the sake of thy noble husband I will again give thee the opportunity to clear thyself of this charge. Throw a few grains of incense into that urn in front of the statue of Mars, and thou shalt be free to go with thy husband."

"Not for all thy possessions—not for all the world—would I barter my soul. What is this life compared to the one beyond the grave? The wisest men of their age, Socrates and Plato, believed in the immortality of the soul, although they lived in an age of darkness. How then, can we, who have seen the light, refuse to let it enter the windows of our soul? Now thou knowest why I will deny the one, true and living God."

Domitian was by this time in a rage, and with flashing eyes he said:

"Silence! I will give thee one more chance to save thy life. If thou hast

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not been bewitched, thou wilt gladly accept of my mercy. It is only for the sake of thy brave husband, who is overcome by his grief, that I give thee one more chance. Once more I command thee to cast a grain of incense into yonder urn. If thou dost not, thou shalt go to the Amphitheatre, and then thou wilt repent when no power shall save thee from the lions." (To be continued.)



WHY TIGERS C...

The tale is of the Tiger who is the cat; they dwell among the shade of Ararat. The cat was very heavy Buffalo; his claws were long; his wit was strong; he braced his voice; he struck him how.

The cat on velvet Pad the quiet hill; "Now this," she whistled, "is the way to st. The cat drew up his moss—forest count "And this," she said, "is the proper way. She hurried through a missile from a "And that, my loving only way to spring.

Oh, hungry was the N Aunt was sleek as The Tiger at his feet first apprentice ju He did very ably more quick than Eeaped his clutched up a cedar tree. To win the Star a hough on which "How glad I am, and I didn't teach you.

And since that curtail rudiments of crime No outstripping Tiger how to climb. HIS WORD ONLY.

It was a critical point between two teams re high schools. The last night had been score stood five to five. Plainfield, two men war on bases, and catcher for the Green.

One strike had been struck at the next and drove it into right quick stop and a goal was fiddled to first only a fraction of a second to catch Ransom, who great run and had slud The two bases—had slud The plate with the tw to win the game for G. The voice of the f however, was heard al that arose.

"Hold on!" he shout. "He was out, fa I'll leave it to him if The umpire raised his walked over to first ba "Ransom," he said, "to you. How was it?" "Tell him the bas painted the first ba bright, now, did you h to win the game for G. on the bag whom I put you?"