



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XX.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, OCT. 29, 1869.

No. 11.

(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 XIII.—CONTINUED.

However, you must be the same young girl of whom Vibius spoke as having been adjudicated to Regulus under Parmenon's name, and sold to me by Parmenon. Poor child—poor child! repeated Aurelia, gazing with compassionate tenderness on the young slave. 'But why did your father sell you? How you must hate him!' 'Hate him! Oh, no, madam. My father was very unhappy, and he thought he was pleasing his gods.' 'Your father then sacrificed you because you are a Christian? But you should have abjured your creed, and he would not have sold you!' 'Doubtless, madam I could have saved myself by this means. But we should not thus abjure our faith.'

And, in fact, we owe some explanations to the reader on this subject. CHAPTER XIV.—THE CHRISTIAN PRIEST AND THE PAGAN VIRGIN. Young Flavius, the son of Flavius Clemens and Flavia Domitilla, and named Vespasian by Domitian when the latter raised him and his brother to the dignity of Cæsars, was a little older than the divine Aurelia, for he was in his eighteenth year. He was a hopeful youth, with a noble, proud, and impetuous disposition, and withal gifted with rare modesty and moderation. Quintilian, the learned tutor of the two young princes, took much pains to form their minds, and in Vespasian, especially, he had found a ready and willing pupil. This young Cæsar had devoted himself principally to the study of eloquence; notwithstanding the high rank to which he was destined, his ambition was to excel in this most difficult of sciences which the Romans held in such high esteem. The young man had perfectly understood that he must strive to acquire distinction without awakening the jealous suspicions of the emperor, and he had sought it in the study of letters. By this prudent course he had succeeded in gaining Domitian's affection, so far, at least, as the latter's nature was susceptible of feeling love.—The two brothers would have been well satisfied to live like simple citizens, enjoying merely the honor due to their rank; the emperor, therefore, was satisfied with his choice which disarmed other ambitions, and he continued to show his nephews much favor. Vespasian and Aurelia loved each other from childhood, and they had been betrothed even before Domitian had made any dispositions to leave the empire to the sons of Flavius Clemens. These two lovers, equally gifted by nature, were of totally different characters. Vespasian, as we have said, had that pride common to all Roman patricians, but tempered by a greatness of mind which made it a lofty virtue. Aurelia looked upon her high rank as the greatest of privileges, and her vanity did not always preserve her from the weaknesses which generally accompany this secret infirmity of the most amiable minds. Dazzled by the prospect of the honors which awaited her, she often gave way to the capricious independence of supreme power. Flavia Domitilla, whose ardent zeal had met with so much success among the members of her family, had sought to convert her young cousin to the religion of Christ: but Christianity and the empire were so incompatible at that time, that the young patrician who saw in a change of religion the ruin of her magnificent hopes, had rejected with supreme contempt the overtures made by the pious matron. Things had gone so far, that it was deemed expedient to conceal from the divine Aurelia the fact that her betrothed had deserted the creed of which the emperors were sovereign pontiffs, for fear that her regrets and complaints should reach Domitian's ears. The imperious and frivolous girl, who loved her kindred with the passionate affection of a generous heart, had, however, sought to punish them for their repeated attempts to convert her, and we have already learned from Palæstrion's conversation with Regulus, that for some time past, she had ceased holding intercourse with them. But now she had bought Cecilia; the good news reached Flavia Domitilla, who hailed it as a happy omen. Yet, how could she see the young patrician after their quarrel? How could Aurelia be asked in the name of Christ, whom she had refused to know, to give up a young girl whom her vanity would doubtless counsel her to keep. It was difficult for Flavia Domitilla and Flavius Clemens, who knew nothing of the secret dispositions of Aurelia, to intervene personally in this circumstance. And yet, it was important to seize an opportunity which might not present itself again. As they were discussing anxiously this question Vespasian came up with Clemens, the Christian Bishop, who had become the successor of Peter, Anacletus having recently died. Clemens was apparently connected with the imperial family. We merely mention the fact—it adds nothing to his merits or his virtues. The young cæsar and the pontiff learned from Flavia Domitilla what had occurred, and the embarrassment in which she was, how to proceed. 'But,' said Vespasian, 'Aurelia cannot be angry with me.'

perhaps this child, so rebellious to divine grace, may at last be moved.' 'You will probably meet the Grand Vestal there,' remarked Flavia Domitilla. 'I know that she has been living with Aurelia for some time past.' 'Well,' replied the priest, with a smile, 'the Grand-Vestal will know that the pontiff of the Christians watches over the virgins confided to his care, not to chastise them as Helvius Agrippa does, but to return them to freedom and happiness when they have fallen into slavery. Do you think, pious matron, that this contrast will be useless?' So it happened that Vespasian and Clemens made their appearance in the Grand-Vestal's apartments, at Aurelia's, when they were the least expected. A silent pause had followed Vespasian's words. The young cæsar reading in Aurelia's eyes the desire that he should explain his demand, resumed: 'Yes, my dear Aurelia, our relation, Flavia Domitilla, whose envoys we are, hopes that she will obtain from you the release of this young girl, her sister in the faith of Christ.' 'Madam,' added the pontiff, in a gentle and penetrating voice, 'I am the first pastor of an unhappy and desolate flock, and when one of my sheep groans and suffers, I run to save her. This is why I have come to you! . . .'

and their mysteries, and you will say whether we deserve the hatred which people bear us. 'The strangest slanders are circulated against us, and we are even accused of the most horrible crimes. The least prejudiced believe that our religion is vain and indecent, and I have heard, among other absurdities, that they laugh at our veneration for the consecrated head of an ass or a hog. Are not these,' he added, addressing Vibius and Metellus, 'the stories you have heard?' Metellus and Vibius replied that they had often heard of this ridiculous worship. 'Do they not allege that, in our assemblies, a young child, covered with flour in order to deceive the eye and to disguise the horror of the crime, is put to death by other children trained to inflict secret wounds; and that the priest divides the bleeding and palpitating limbs among the Christians who drink of this blood and eat of this flesh, swearing by this abominable pact mutual fidelity and eternal silence?' 'Yes,' replied Vibius Crispus and Metellus Celer. 'Such are the accusations brought against the Christians.' 'O religion of Christ! O holy repasts of my brethren! O assemblies of the elect!' exclaimed the Pontiff, 'why have error and falsehoods disfigured our sacred ceremonies and calumniated the mysteries of divine love? Ah, is it not evident that these accusations are an excuse for those feasts of the Good Goddess, from which the Vestals withdraw horrified; for those abominations of the 'Quinquatria' of Minerva; for those human sacrifices of Jupiter Latiarius and of the days of Mars and Bellona; for these impious conjurations when cups of blood are drunk with enthusiasm; for those detestable religious feasts where the flesh of human victims is partaken of as a wholesome and agreeable food! . . .'

'But, my lord,' remarked Vibius, interrupting the Pontiff, 'you honor the cross. It is, they affirm, the sign and foundation of your creed.' Vibius, who could say nothing to contradict facts too patent to be denied, had found this grave objection. 'Yes, we honor the cross,' replied the priest, with respectful and sainted animation, 'yes the cross is the great symbol and the sacred sign of the redemption we have come to announce.— This surprises you? Oh, I can understand that it should. Rome cannot so suddenly lower her pride before the hated instrument of the slave's punishment. She must fear that which is the hope of those who suffer, and the condemnation of those who oppose. But the times have commenced when the cross shall speak to the world of charity and justice, of truth and love, of the strength and wisdom which are unknown to it. The cross will teach the world that all men are brothers, by the spectacle of a God suffering ignominious death to save alike the master and the slave. It will cause to bud forth, everywhere, holiness of life, and that voluntary chastity, the glory of our virgins, which Rome could never obtain from the unhappy victims, torn since childhood from the joys of the family and condemned to an unwilling sacrifice, except through the terror of the most fearful punishment.' This allusion to the fate of the Grand-Vestal—so transparent and rendered so solemn by her present circumstances—caused those who listened to the pontiff's words to shudder with painful emotion. Cornelia raised her eyes, so expressively said, to the speaker, and as her glance met that of the priest, beaming with loving compassion, her features expressed a strange bitterness. 'Here are,' resumed Clemens, 'all the mysteries of Christianity. Here is what I am charged to teach my brethren in our holy assemblies. Here is what I can reveal to Regulus, if he wishes to know what takes place among us. Do you think, my lords, that our religion is a cloak for fearful crimes, and that we can have much to fear from this man's denunciations? . . .'